The Goal of the Wisecrack

Unmasking Rosita Šorytė's Bitter Winter Diatribe

Wahid Azal

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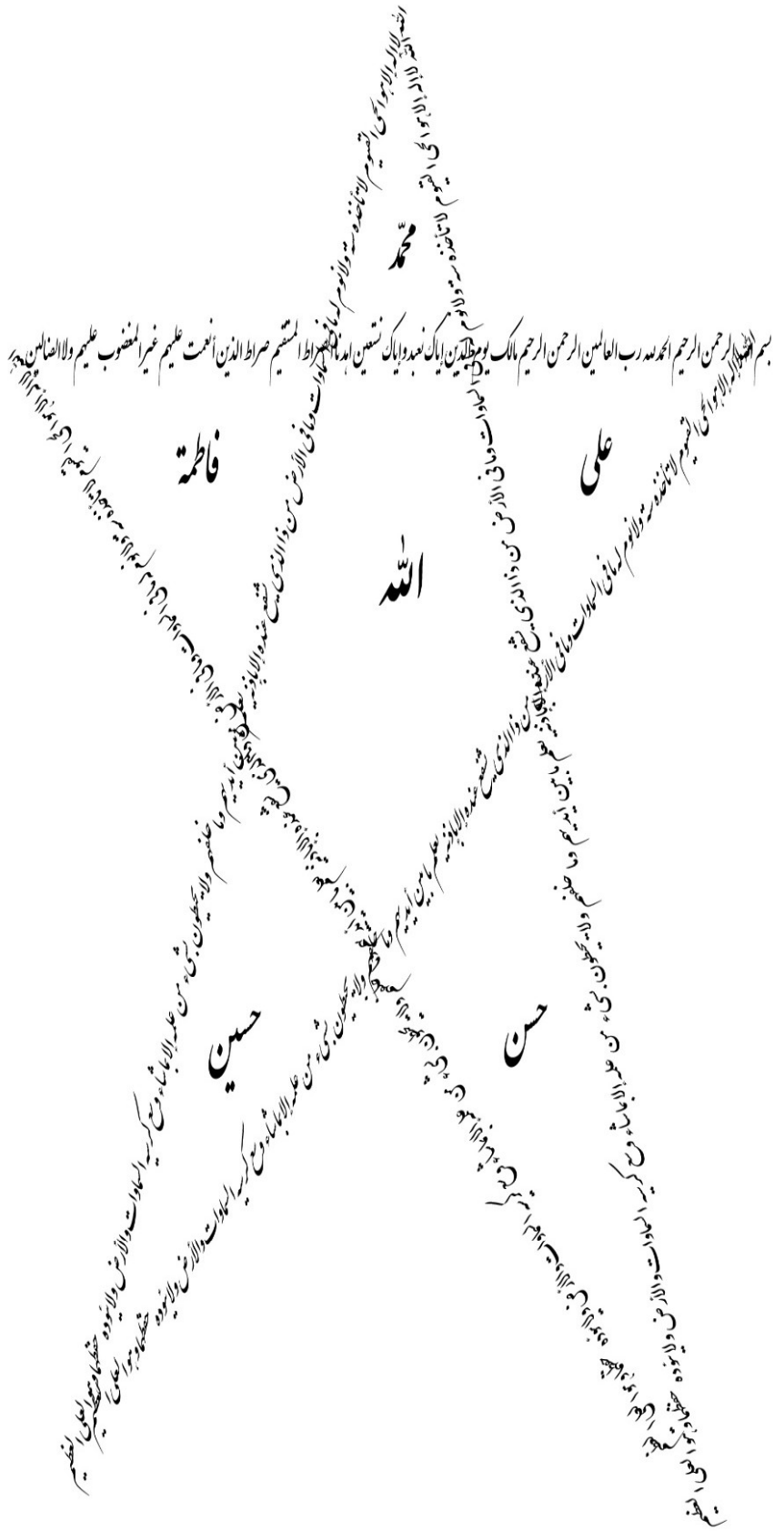
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قسم والشمس وضحٰہا
قسم والفجر
قسم والضحیٰ
قسم والعصر

The Goal of the

Wisecrack

Unmasking Rosita Šorytė's Bitter Winter Diatribe

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Speak with the wise, for their counsel is clear,
Not with the fools, who bring trouble and fear!

Wisdom is known where true reason is hurled—
Her "Goal of the Wise" is the "Joke of the World!"

سخن با خردمند باید شمرد

نه با ابلهان کاو بود رنج و درد

نشان خرد باشد از دانش است

هدف خرد او هزل جهان گشته است

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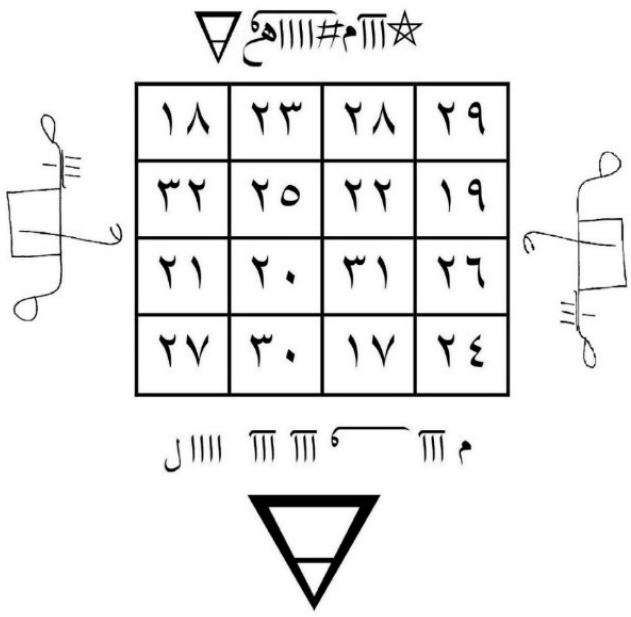

Abbreviations & Related Works

AROLP	The Ahmadi Religion of Light and Peace.[1]
CESNUR	Center for Studies on New Religions (*Centro Studi sulle Nuove Religioni*).[2]

*** Wake up!** A *fatwa* and Epistle in Refutation of ʿAbdullāh Hāshim, the **Father of Lies** (*abū'l-kāẓib*) (Library of the Greatest Name: Brisbane, 2025).[3]

*** The Goal of the Unwise** (*ghāyat'ul-ḥumq*): Wake up! Part 2 (Library of the Greatest Name: Brisbane, 2025).[4]

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmadi_Religion_of_Peace_and_Light (retrieved 27 August 2025).
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CESNUR (retrieved 27 August 2025).
[3] https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/10131653 (retrieved 27 August 2025).
[4] https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/10134012 (retrieved 27 August 2025).

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هو الجبّار القهّار

سُبْحَانَهُ ٱلَّذِي أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا، وَقَهَرَ ٱلْخَلَائِقَ عِزًّا وَحُكْمًا، وَخَضَعَتْ لِجَلَالِهِ ٱلصُّعُودُ وَٱلْهُبُوطُ، وَسَجَدَتْ لِكِبْرِيَائِهِ ٱلرُّوحُ وَٱلْمَلَكُوتُ. هُوَ ٱلَّذِي لَا يَفُوتُهُ هَارِبٌ، وَلَا يَعْجِزُهُ مَطْلُوبٌ، وَبِيَدِهِ مَفَاتِيحُ ٱلْغُيُوبِ وَمَصَائِرُ ٱلْقُدُورِ. فَتَبَارَكَ ٱللَّهُ رَبُّ ٱلْعَالَمِينَ، ٱلَّذِي لَا يَزَالُ وَلاَ يَزُولُ، وَهُوَ ٱلْقَهَّارُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِ وَهُوَ ٱلْحَكِيمُ ٱلْجَبَّارُ.

وَلَعَنَاتُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَىٰ جَمِيعِ ٱلظَّالِمِينَ ٱلْمُسْتَكْبِرِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ بَعْدُ، وَصَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ وَتَسْلِيمَاتُهُ عَلَىٰ جَمِيعِ مُصْطَفِينِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ بَعْدُ، وَإِنَّمَا الْبَهَاءُ مِنَ اللَّهِ عَلَى النَّاوِرِينَ، وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ نُورِ الْعَالَمِينَ.[1]

1: An Augmented Postpartem to *The Goal of the Unwise*: Cultic Apologism, Digital Cloaking, and the Rise of the Meta-Theocratic Machine[2]

Corvaglia offers the most accurate description yet read of what is, essentially, a multinational religious-based ***intelligence operation*** [i.e. **CESNUR**]

~Jeffrey Augustine[3]

Public intellectuals of any calibre or rank possess a clear moral responsibility and duty of care to speak truth to power. Their position, whether earned through academic standing, cultural influence, institutional authority, or even none at all, is not a license for comfort or prestige but a mandate to confront the distortions, corruptions, and injustices of their time. When public intellectuals retreat into silence, or worse, lend their voices to the amplification of propaganda and untruth, they abdicate the very function that legitimates their role in a given society. Thus, to speak truth to power is not merely a matter of critique, but an ethical obligation to those who cannot themselves be heard, and to future generations who inherit the legacies of present struggles. In a world increasingly saturated by manufactured narratives and algorithmic noise, the voice of the public intellectual must remain uncompromising, courageous, and unassimilable (nay, *prophetic*)—otherwise it risks becoming yet another instrument in the arsenal of domination and the process of corruption.

The Goal of the Wisecrack

Now, the title of this monograph, *The Goal of the Wisecrack*, is deliberate. It plays on the well-known *Goal of the Wise* (*ghāyat al-ḥakīm*), the corrupt pseudo-scripture of the **Ahmadi Religion of Plagiarism and Laundering** (**AROPL**),[4] and my earlier rejoinder, *The Goal of the Unwise*.[5] Where **AROPL**'s "goal" was fraudulent theology, and my counter-text exposed its internal incoherence, Rosita Šorytė's *Bitter Winter* diatribe offers not serious argument but a caricature—a "wisecrack" in the literal sense: cheap polemic masquerading as scholarship. This monograph therefore situates her text where it belongs: not in the register of reasoned discourse but in the toxic lineage of racist Orientalist ridicule, cult-apologist propaganda, and narrative warfare. To unmask this *wisecrack* is to show how **CESNUR**'s apologetic machine operates: laundering fraud into "religion," delegitimizing critics through racialized dismissal and even more racist psycopathologization, cloaking thereby metastable cults under the guise of "religious liberty"—when the actual situation is anything but.

In exposing this rhetorical sleight of hand, the task is not merely to rebut Šorytė's surface claims but to diagnose the deeper discursive pathology at work. Her "wisecrack" is not innocent wit; it is the tactical deployment of irony and mockery as weapons of epistemic violence. The intent is twofold: first, to trivialize the gravity of the critique being levelled against **AROPL** and its handlers, reducing matters of ideology, power, and manipulation to a punchline; second, to inscribe critics of **CESNUR**'s project (or, rather, *investment*) into a caricature of irrationality, so that

their voices can be dismissed before they are even heard. In this sense, the "wisecrack" functions as a technology of silencing. It translates serious intellectual, theological, and ethical objections into fodder for a laugh-track, making ridicule serve where reason has failed. To confront it, then, is to insist on restoring seriousness where bad faith has staged a carnival of distraction. We understand this overall process with its patterns quite well because we were already subjected to it by the Bahāʾīs.

Indeed, the very reliance on such ridicule betrays the weakness of the position it seeks to defend. When substantive engagement with sources, doctrines, and lived realities is absent, sarcasm and caricature rush in to fill in the void. This is the oldest tactic of apologetic desperation: where truth cannot be argued, it must be mocked into irrelevance. By reducing complex theological dissent and critical scholarship to objects of derision, **CESNUR** and its orbit attempt to transform fraud into *fait accompli*, and resistance into pathology. Yet this strategy, far from neutralizing critique, only underscores its necessity. For every sneer or dismissive wisecrack reveals the anxious tremor of a narrative regime that knows its claims cannot withstand sustained examination. Such manoeuvres are not only evasions; they are projections. The very charge of irrationality and fanaticism hurled at critics mirrors the cultic irrationality **CESNUR** works to sanitize. In this inversion, the oppressor dons the mask of the enlightened, while the whistle-blower is cast as the deviant. But ridicule cannot erase the documentary trail of fraud, nor can cheap

polemics dissolve the ethical stakes of enabling manipulative networks. What emerges, instead, is the spectacle of a compromised intellectual project, more invested in shielding its clients than in pursuing truth.

Now, the completion of *The Goal of the Unwise* was, in a very real sense, a blow struck in darkness against a moving, faceless shadow—a speculative architecture of cultic power operating within the digital folds of our age. That this architecture exists, I believed; that it was coordinated, I suspected; that it had ties to theocratic and technocratic interests, I was increasingly convinced. But what Luigi Corvaglia's ***Fascists, Spies, and Gurus***[6] trilogy did for us is not merely to confirm these suspicions: it diagrammed the machine.

Corvaglia's work supplies what had previously been elusive: the contours of a system that is neither spontaneous nor chaotic but patterned, recursive, and deliberately engineered. The trilogy reveals how disparate actors—political lobbies, intelligence services, sectarian movements, and academic front-groups—interlock through channels of money, legitimacy, and narrative management. In doing so, it transforms what once seemed like a conspiracy too shadowy to chart into a cartography of influence whose coordinates can be traced and named. This is not paranoia but sociology: an anatomy of networks that thrive on opacity while depending on apologists like **CESNUR** to launder their image. Where *The Goal of the Unwise* gestured toward the existence of such machinery, *Fascists, Spies, and Gurus* dissects its gears, showing the logic of collaboration between authoritarian power

and cultic manipulation in the digital present. Indeed, Corvaglia's meticulous research into what he terms the "**cult apologist mafia**" serves as a post-facto footnote—no, a strategic appendage—to *The Goal of the Unwise*.[7] His findings fill in, with specificity and historical grounding, the very mechanisms that my own analysis had inferred only through pattern recognition and lived antagonism. What I described as the performative algorithmic sanctification of messianic cultism—what I called the metaphysical laundering of coercion into Light—Corvaglia shows as a political praxis, institutionalized and ongoing.

Let us begin with the basic structure of the cultic-apologist complex he outlines. It comprises a transnational web of lawyers, pseudo-academics, and lobbyists, many of whom have ties to Scientology, the Unification Church, and other well-documented high-control sects. These actors operate under the banner of interfaith tolerance and religious liberty. Their organizations—**CESNUR, the All Faiths Network, Bitter Winter, FOB**, and others—function as public-facing instruments of reputational sanitization for groups that, by all empirical standards, operate through psychological manipulation, social atomization, political and spiritual authoritarianism. They are not neutral defenders of conscience. They are strategic agents of narrative warfare.

And here, the parallel with **AROLP** becomes unmistakable. For what we see in **AROLP** is not an isolated mutation on the digital fringe but a textbook manifestation of the same apologetic architecture in miniature. Its pseudo-theology is packaged in

the rhetoric of liberation, its manipulative structures disguised as communal empowerment, its authoritarian centralization camouflaged under a discourse of "light" and "peace." And just as **CESNUR** and its satellites launder the reputations of older sects by reframing coercion as "religious freedom," so too do **AROLP**'s propagandists attempt to rebrand psychological capture as spiritual awakening. The continuity is too precise to dismiss as coincidence: the same tropes, the same inversions of victim and perpetrator, the same appeal to inverted Western discourses of 'pluralism' to shield authoritarian practice. In short, **AROLP** stands not outside but within the ecosystem Corvaglia charts, its "newness" merely a digital skin stretched over an old and well-rehearsed apologetic playbook.

As I posited in the two earlier monographs, **AROLP**'s curious immunity from deplatforming, despite clear patterns of cultic behaviour, suggests algorithmic preference or protection. Its rapid and frictionless propagation across platforms—Reddit, Medium, Facebook, YouTube—combined with its uncanny alignment with keywords palatable to progressive digital ecosystems (e.g. 'peace', 'light', 'unity', 'awakening') marks it as a machine-engineered spiritual product, a *start-up*: one designed to blend in, to evade critique, to seduce. This is not the organic diffusion of a grassroots movement but the patterned trajectory of content optimized for visibility and shielded from the ordinary frictions of moderation. Its messaging is engineered to resonate with algorithmic logics of virality—short, affective, easily shareable—while its vocabulary parasitically (but quite porously) feeds on the

semiotics of 'social justice' and 'digital spirituality'. The result is a mimetic cult, a simulacrum of religiosity that wears the garments of inclusivity while concealing the skeleton of uber-authoritarian control. In this sense, **AROLP** exemplifies what I have elsewhere called the *platform theocracy*: a formation whose legitimacy is less conferred by doctrine than by the algorithmic infrastructure that sustains its reach.

Corvaglia shows that such strategies have precedent. The actors in his trilogy are not marginal cranks; they are lobbyists within the EU Parliament. They are speechmakers at UN forums. They are builders of legitimacy—or, rather, professional managers of geopolitical perceptions. They operate not from the shadows but from podiums draped in the banners of international institutions, where the very language of *rights* and *liberty* is inverted into a shield for coercion. By embedding themselves in these spaces, they convert sectarian apologetics into the idiom of policy, laundering private manipulations into the currency of public legitimacy. What emerges is a machinery of influence that normalizes what should be unmasked, transforming authoritarian enclaves into supposed stakeholders in the global conversation on conscience and belief. In short, what Corvaglia proves is that **CESNUR** and its institutional allies are nothing more than those extensions of Western Atlanticist hybrid warfare grids with its aggressive social engineering targeting both internal as well as external populations. That governments are either impotent or unwilling to confront it, is a big part of the overall problem that

therefore necessitates urgent response from any sector or voice that it may come from.

In *The Goal of the Unwise*, I described **AROLP** as a *metastable cult*—that is, a system engineered for digital durability, capable of reproducing its core messages in hostile or indifferent information ecosystems. At the time when I was writing *The Goal of the Unwise* what I did not yet possess was the structural proof that such durability might be the result of deliberate, institutional *backing*. Through years of observation and pattern recognition, I had inferred it. Corvaglia gives us that proof in black and white. He reveals that not only do such cults receive apologetic support—they receive geopolitical shielding. He reveals connections to far-right clericalist movements, to covert intelligence figures, to post-Soviet and transatlantic ideological currents all united in a curious alliance: protecting cultic control under the aegis of 'religious pluralism'. During my public fight with the Bahāʾīs, I had already deduced as much, but did not yet possess the foolproof mapping and evidence that Corvaglia offers us—and, lo and behold, as unequivocally proven on the pages of **CESNUR**'s own website, the Bahāʾīs are already fully part of this **cult apologist mafia**, and have been for decades.[8] Thus, Corvaglia's magisterial scholarship proved to me that in the Bahāʾīs, **AROLP**, and others who had (un)graced my path over the years, I was actually facing the same enemy—one whose tentacles had long reached into the heart of my own extended family, ever disguising itself behind shifting masks.

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Why? Because such systems as **AROLP** and the Bahāʾī faith are extremely useful to Empire. Useful for surveilling dissident populations or individuals and pacifying them—and in these two cases, specifically Iranians and Shiʿi Muslims.[9] It is also useful for exporting soft power, and it is useful for draining critical energy away from truly emancipatory spiritual movements (like the Bayān and similar) by flooding the field with controlled messianisms. In **AROLP** I quickly saw not a passing quirk, but a chapter in the Atlantic West's sustained imperial war—systematically sanitizing and corrupting spirit, culture, and people alike wherever it lays its reverse Midas touch turning whatever it touches into *merde*.

Like the Bahāʾī faith, **AROLP** is one such controlled messianism: a controlled messianism deliberately weaponized by Atlantic power centers and aimed at the Shiʿi Islamic world specifically as a psychological operation, with **CESNUR** as **AROLP**'s official handler—so that while **AROLP** destabilizes hearts and minds, American and Israeli military incursions may find it all the easier to kill masses of local populations in Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, Gaza and elsewhere. That **AROLP**'s teachings are absurd is irrelevant; absurdity is part of the method. What matters is that its structure mimics authenticity, its language feigns revolution, and its members are obedient. They are a test case for future digital theocracies, where compliance will masquerade as enlightenment and AI-generated scripture will be sold as divine truth. In this sense, **AROLP** is less a faith than a prototype—a laboratory experiment in manufacturing conviction under the conditions of algorithmic capitalism. Its very

absurdity inoculates it against rational critique, because those who persist within it must frame doubt as betrayal and compliance as transcendence. What is rehearsed here, under the guise of "awakening," is the conditioning of populations to accept surveillance as guidance, and manipulation as revelation (like MAGA, QAnon, and many similar movements, for instance).

The deeper danger lies in how **AROLP** normalizes the marriage of technological infrastructure and theological claim. By fusing algorithms with revelation, it habituates adherents to treat the feed as scripture and the platform as pulpit. What might seem like fringe absurdity today is, in fact, a rehearsal of tomorrow's governance model, where obedience is mediated not through clerics or generals but through the persuasive cadence of machine-curated prophecy. In this emerging order, the line between propaganda and prayer collapses, and the mechanisms of control are sanctified by their very presentation as "divine."

History offers no shortage of such prototypes. The Sabbatian eruption of the seventeenth century,[10] the Frankist inversion a century later,[11] and in our own time the synthetic cosmology of Scientology all exemplify forms of *controlled messianism*: movements whose very excess and absurdity masked the deeper logic of manipulation. Each promised redemption but delivered control, each wrapped authoritarian discipline in the garb of mystical renewal. **AROLP** differs only in medium, not in kind: where Sabbatai Sevi (d. 1676) relied on the mystique of Ottoman courts and Scientology on the veneer of therapeutic science, **AROLP**

weaponizes the algorithm itself, turning platforms into pulpits and code into creed. In this sense, it stands as the digital inheritor of an old pattern—manufactured revelation calibrated to disorient communities, fracture traditions, and make populations pliable to geopolitical design, imperial war, regime change, conquest, pacification, and exploitation.

Now, *The Goal of the Unwise* was written in the fog of war during the Israeli attack on Iran in June 2025, amid smears and threats, betrayals, digital disappearances, and personal loss.[12] What Corvaglia offers now is the cartographic outline of the enemy terrain. This is a war not merely for minds but for *semantic sovereignty*—a battle over who gets to name reality, who gets to define religion, who gets to weaponize transcendence. In such a battlefield, words themselves become weapons, and categories are trenches to be seized or defended. To concede the power of naming is to surrender the capacity to resist, for once manipulation is baptized as "liberty" and coercion as "faith," the terrain of critique collapses. Corvaglia's map thus equips us not only to identify the positions of this adversary but to understand the rules of its discursive war—rules in which distortion is strategy, erasure is policy, and legitimacy is manufactured through the repetition of outright lies.

Thus, we must now understand **AROLP** not just as a cult, but as a *pilot program*. We must understand its symbiosis with platform infrastructure as a form of metaphysical **psy-ops**. And we must understand that the only adequate response is

not further reaction to it specifically, but strategic counter-narrative and instead reaction against its handlers (i.e. **CESNUR**) and their Atlanticist handlers: the building of resilient truth architectures, capable of withstanding not only lies, but the simulated light of the algorithmic demiurge. For if **AROLP** is allowed to stand uncontested, it will serve as the proof of a concept that such synthetic revelations can be scaled, iterated, and franchised across the digital sphere. What is at stake, then, is not merely the exposure of one sect but the preservation of the very conditions under which truth can be spoken without capture. Thus, to counter the algorithmic demiurge requires not nostalgia for older certainties, but the invention of new discursive immunities—forms of critique that are themselves adaptive, viral, and unassimilable by the machinery of control.

What this demands is nothing less than a reorientation of intellectual struggle itself: from reactive denunciation to proactive theurgy of discourse, because we are indeed, for lack of a better term, inside an *occult war*: the proverbial metaphysical war between black and white sorcerers. It is not enough to debunk **AROLP**'s fraudulence or even to expose **CESNUR**'s complicity; rather, we must cultivate counter-forms whose very existence destabilizes the infrastructure of capture—and that means to confront and neutralize the inverted spirit of Empire at its malevolent, *noospheric* core. Such forms must be generative rather than merely critical, producing living traditions of resistance that cannot be reduced to content or commodified into lifestyle. In this sense, the battle is not only political but

ontological: it concerns whether language remains a vehicle of divine disclosure (*tajallī*) or whether it collapses into the echo chamber of data extraction, inversion, and control. In short, here is where Theophanocracy meets one of its main antagonists during this generation and so why the response must be both Fanonian as well as theurgical simultaneously.

To speak of counter-forms, then, is to speak of building an insurgent grammar: a way of arranging words, images, and gestures that resists both capture and simulation. Just as viruses mutate to escape immune recognition, so too must our truth-forms embody unpredictability, drawing on forgotten archives, subterranean lineages, and living sparks of Theophany. Against the algorithmic demiurge's attempt to flatten meaning into metadata, we must insist on opacity, density, and the irreducible excess of Revelation. Only through such unruly architectures can the very possibility of freedom be safeguarded from the anesthetizing glow of synthetic light and imperial political malevolence. Be that as it may, what **CESNUR** does not yet realize is that in me they have met an archetypal David to their Goliath, Elijah to their priests of Baal—and the symbolic Fire of Heaven has already been called down upon them, along with the litany of false prophets they cultivate, each now standing in the archetypes within the celestial firing range.

Now, Be Scofield's recent investigation (*Guru Magazine*, Aug. 24, 2025)[13] lays bare the extent of **CESNUR**'s complicity with the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light (**AROPL**). What she documents is not merely academic negligence but an active

collusion: Massimo Introvigne, Holly Folk, Susan Palmer, Gordon Melton, and Eileen Barker appearing as honoured guests of a cult leader accused of sexual abuse, coercive abortions, blood oaths, and *demands for murder*. These are not vague charges—they are specific, corroborated allegations of authoritarian abuse. Yet, in Crewe, England this last August (2025), the very figures who style themselves as the sober interpreters of "new religions" stood shoulder to shoulder with Hashem's cadre, praising him, defending him, and smearing survivors and critics.

This context exposes the grotesque irony of *Bitter Winter*'s hit piece against us. For while Rosita Šorytė labors to pathologize dissent and to paint critics as irrational, the same network of "cult apologist" scholars she works alongside are actively laundering the image of a group accused of rape, trafficking, and messianic authoritarianism. Introvigne and his allies were not merely passive observers—they took expenses, awarded Hashem's writings bogus prizes, moderated his sessions, and broadcast his propaganda. As Scofield notes, they even replicated cult smear tactics, putting her image on screen at their conference and branding her "delusional" or "psychotic." *Bitter Winter* is simply the publishing arm of this operation, a veneer of legitimacy placed on what amounts to PR for authoritarian sects. This is organized criminality writ large.

The parallels are unmistakable. When **CESNUR**, through *Bitter Winter*, attacks us with psychiatric slurs and with the same tired rhetoric about "delusional critics," it is precisely the strategy documented in Scofield's exposé: an academic shield that

cult leaders can hide behind. The so-called "Supremacy of God" conference in Crewe, England is proof. Here were the doyens of the **CESNUR** network, giddy at being led through Hashem's compound, while ignoring ex-member testimonies of abuse. Holly Folk even told the audience "one shouldn't trust ex-cult member accounts." In other words, truth is to be silenced, survivors discarded, critics smeared. This is not scholarship—it is collusion and it is outright criminal. Perhaps Holly Folk's credentials should no longer be trusted either, nor her purported academic affiliations or rank. In her, we see living proof of our larger argument that neoliberal capitalism has thoroughly corrupted Western academia.

Thus, when we read Šorytė's diatribe in *Bitter Winter*, we should understand it for what it is: the ideological twin of those smiling photos of Introvigne and Barker holding Hashem's book in front of **AROPL**'s compound. It is propaganda laundering itself as scholarship. And it is precisely this entanglement—between authoritarian cult leaders and compromised academics—that renders **CESNUR** and its satellites not neutral analysts but active participants in the very abuses they pretend to study. Given this, they must be confronted and exposed without pulling a single punch.

Another point we wish to underscore here before closing this section—a point that the reader needs to keep in the back of their mind throughout—before moving on to the next few sections, is that in dissecting works like the *Bitter Winter* hit piece, one sees the enduring logic Michel Foucault (d. 1984) unravelled: the pathologizing of dissent as a mechanism of exclusion. For Foucault, psychiatry and medicine are

not neutral sciences but "mechanisms shaping 'a manifestation of truth inside the norms of knowledge and a production of truth in the form of the test,' the latter always tending to hide beneath and get its justification from the former"[14]—revealing how institutional discourse can masquerade as objective while actually enforcing conformity. In *Madness and Civilization*, he describes the transformation of madness into a category of exclusion, where the "'language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason about madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence'"[15]—a useful model for understanding how narratives like *Bitter Winter* silence interlocutors by labelling them *pathological*. Foucault further observed how "As leprosy vanished..."[16] the figure of the leper was to be played by the poor, the prisoners and the 'alienated—demonstrating that societal mechanisms of exclusion are merely transposed onto new objects. Finally, in *Psychiatric Power*, he casts psychiatric authority as an "effective agent of reality, a sort of intensifier of reality to madness," showing how power enforces one version of reality over another, the "medically sanctioned 'sanity'" over the deviant.[17] In short, Foucault gives us both the genealogy and the weaponized vocabulary needed to expose how the *Bitter Winter* piece—and those in its orbit—mobilize psychiatric language to tame, discredit, and exclude political opposition. Yet Rosita Šorytė has made this gimmick so transparent in her published diatribe that she appears to have detonated her own tripwire against herself in the process.

That said, Corvaglia has confirmed the conspiracy. Let us now build its counter-scripture. Here, however, we will be further dismantling the *Bitter Winter* diatribe masquerading itself as scholarship (which it isn't). As such, we began here with a mention of Corvaglia and likewise we will end this monograph by mentioning him again, closing our rebuttal with an appendix: an English translation of a student's essay that demonstrates how our perspectives, though reached from entirely different viewpoints, have fully converged on this overall issue. At this juncture, some further contextualization and analytical framing are necessary before moving on in the final section to a forensic takedown of Šorytė's published *Bitter Winter* hit piece.

2: When an Opponent Makes You a Banner: How CESNUR's Bitter Winter Effectively Elevated Me as the Focal Point of Its Global Opposition[18]

A Persian aphorism I once used to hear from a late grandparent holds that "smear is the confession that argument has failed" (*buhtān iqrār-i ʿajz-i ḥujjat ast*). In this case, **CESNUR**'s smear is nothing less than a tacit admission that everything set forth in *Wake Up!*[19] and *The Goal of the Unwise* is true—for a doctrine that cannot withstand questions enlists prosecutors who are in fact paid lobbyists of the very organization handling **AROLP** as its public relations curators. This is because movements such as **AROLP** do not merely fight ideas; they curate opponents.[20] In August 2025, *Bitter*

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Winter—the media arm of **CESNUR**—published its multi-part series on the recent critics of the so-called Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light (**AROPL**).[21] **Parts 4** and **5** specifically singled me out by name, casting my work as emblematic of a broader "anti-cult" threat. By itself, this singling out makes one fact unmistakable: my two monographs have struck their mark (never mind nerves) and rattled **CESNUR** and **AROLP** to the core. But in so doing, and given the lame attack as response, **CESNUR** did not rebut any arguments I presented (indeed, it failed spectacularly to that end). Instead, together with countless racist dog whistles, the attack deployed a standard play of narrative warfare: elevate one antagonist, define the battlefield through that antagonist, then mobilize audiences around the staged conflict. The outcome was paradoxical but predictable: by attempting to delegitimize Be Scofield and I, **CESNUR** elevated the two of us into the role of unified, primary face of its global opposition—and since we are unequivocally unaffiliated to any organization or institution other than our own, this makes the matter especially problematic for **CESNUR**.

But let us first say here that we proudly own being "anti-cult," a direct threat to **CESNUR**'s crypto-fascist, colonial-entrenched **psy-ops**, driven by its neoliberal techno-feudalist digital theocracy of fraud and ideological capture that they represent—because we are fully cognizant of the fact that these arrogant white European racists and right-wing Roman Catholics are playing an extremely dirty game, victimizing innocents worldwide as an extension of the European colonial-imperial project that first began under the watch of the Roman Catholic Church

itself.[22] Furthermore, we stand by every word in naming **CESNUR** a '**Sabbatian-Frankist Global Outreach Front**,'[23] for that is exactly what they are. Here we will briefly explain why our elevation as one of the significant global faces of opposition to **CESNUR**'s entire agenda happened, using media-effects theory and the documentary record of *Bitter Winter*'s series and masthead. It also sketches the implications for researchers, journalists, and oversight bodies alike.

Now, **CESNUR** claims to operate both as a scholarly network and as an advocacy hub defending contested new religious movements. However, as we argued in *The Goal of the Unwise*, it is effectively (or, rather, *essentially*) a corporate lobby organization for cults (New Religious Movements/**NRM**s). *Bitter Winter* is its daily magazine, edited by **CESNUR**'s founder, Massimo Introvigne. The publication explicitly attempts to position itself as a global platform on religious liberty with substantial reach into policy and media circles. This dual role—research voice and advocacy channel—gives **CESNUR** an unusually agenda-setting capacity when it chooses whom to profile as an adversary. In other words, when *Bitter Winter* names you, it's not a random blog post. It's the house outlet of the network most closely identified—rightly or wrongly—with the defence of controversial groups (some of them with documented cases of criminality attached) and the critique of anti-cult narratives.

When in mid-August 2025, *Bitter Winter* launched its five-part series on "AROPL and the Rise of New Age Anti-Cultism" it also set a trap for itself that it itself

deliberately walked into, and one in which we will now fully capitalize on. **Part 1** establishes a taxonomy of opposition; **Parts 2** and **3** targets a prominent critic (Be Scofield); **Parts 4** and **5** centers its fire on me by name. This editorial architecture matters. It moves from the general (defining the battlefield) to the personal (naming antagonists), with the "you are the problem" crescendo timed to maximize audience focus. That is classic central-casting in issue advocacy: identify one face to stand in for a diverse coalition of critics.

Why select me? I believe, because my critique of **AROLP** attacks a load-bearing doctrine—*reincarnation*—using insider philosophical and scriptural tools (Mullā Ṣadrā's metaphysics of resurrection vs. transmigration; the Bāb's doctrine of *rajaʿa*/return as theophany rather than serial embodiment) to do so. Responding to that critique requires specialist engagement, which Rosita Šorytė does not possess (she does not know Arabic nor has specialized knowledge in Islamic esotericism). Thus, delegitimization is cheaper, slicker and faster. Making me "the" antagonist reframes an intricate doctrinal debate as a simple personality threat—easier to mobilize against and easier to message. Parts of the series deploy precisely this tactic—isolating quotations, highlighting rhetoric, and stitching biographical fragments into a cautionary character sketch.

For example, three editorial moves in **Part 4** perform the elevation:

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1. **Personal Naming**: The headline and body explicitly identify me, not merely my ideas. By choosing a proper-noun focal point, *Bitter Winter* provides its readers and allied commentators a shared reference handle—the first ingredient of a unified opposition image.

2. **Adversarial Framing**: The article imputes dangerousness and suggests police-report implications, shifting the frame from theological disagreement to a public-order concern. That reframing primes audiences to perceive all future critiques routed through me as suspect or menacing—consolidating my role as the archetypal opponent.

3. **Series Context**: Set within a serial package that positions **AROPL** as unfairly maligned (never mind the documented evidence of massive criminality perpetrated by it recorded in multiple jurisdictions) and anti-cult actors as reckless or conspiracist, the personal profile becomes the face of the problem the series claims to solve. This is "representative villainy"—a technique from issue advocacy in which one antagonist stands in for many.

Result: Audiences aligned with **CESNUR** now have a single person to cite whenever the movement's broader critics surface. That is the definition of elevation to unified opposition—a status bestowed, ironically, by the very outlet intent on suppression.

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Now, doctrinally, reincarnation is not peripheral to **AROPL**'s mythic-cultic structure; it underwrites authority claims, narrative continuity, and charisma. A critique that disassembles reincarnation from within Islamic-philosophical and Bābī frameworks threatens the scaffolding of legitimacy, not just a decorative belief. In advocacy logic, when a keystone is attacked by someone fluent in the tradition, you do not concede; you instead recode the attacker. Nevertheless, the argument is a red herring fallacy. This is why *Bitter Winter*'s response leans on biographical exoticism, association smears, and threat templates, rather than a line-by-line theological reply. Such tactics are not simply deflection; they are elevation gestures that tell supporters: "This is the one to defeat." The publication history of *Bitter Winter* shows similar patterns when it seeks to rally communities under pressure—identifying critics, then narrating them as emblematic hazards.

The series also dropped between August 18 and 21, 2025, overlapping with reported local pressure and official complaints—an optimal window for perception management. Synchrony matters: when an international outlet casts you as dangerous while local actors are contesting your credibility, the layered narrative reinforces itself. Even without provable coordination, this adjacent timing gives the impression that "everyone sees the same truth," which is precisely how enemy images congeal in transnational advocacy networks. Nonetheless, this is a tactic of adversarial psychological operations, which is something that **CESNUR** is well

known for and which Rosita Šorytė, as **CESNUR**'s paid lobbyist, has been explicitly commissioned to perform.

But one might ask: doesn't a hit-piece like this risk the Streisand effect, amplifying the very critic one wants to silence? Yes—and that is another reason the elevation is real. By choosing a multi-part rollout and dedicating two full chapters to me, *Bitter Winter* spent agenda capital to place my name in front of its global readership. It then attempted to control downstream interpretation by front-loading adjectives ("dangerous," "conspiracist," "hallucinatory") and embedding me in a template that associates critique with public risk. That strategy acknowledges salience (*I matter enough to feature*) while attempting containment (*I matter in a way they define*). The first half—admission of salience—is not reversible; it is how elevation sticks. In this specifically, Rosita Šorytė has unequivocally proven my allegation in *The Goal of the Unwise* that **CESNUR** is a *democracy manipulator* and so an adversarial fifth column and Trojan Horse operating within democratic societies whilst systematically undermining them—and so why, in this, it needs to be reframed as a threat to democratic societies in the same way that organizations such as the Islamic State (**ISIS**), al-Qaeda, or violent Neo-Nazi groups and similar are taken in the same light.

That aside, several well-studied effects help explain the outcome:

- **Exemplification**: People remember faces better than arguments. By turning a doctrinal debate into a biographical case, the outlet created a memorable example that stands in for a category.
- **Out-Group Homogeneity**: Once one critic is "the" critic, diverse opponents are perceived as variations of the same, strengthening the unifying function of the chosen face.
- **Hostile Media Effect**: Supporters exposed to the profile will perceive any future coverage involving me as further proof of the original narrative, locking in my status as the opposition figure.
- **Agenda Setting**: The series tells other journalists and academics which names to quote when the topic arises; that's how a personal name becomes an index for a whole debate. (Observe *Bitter Winter*'s editorial board and publication rhythm to see how names and topics are routinely scaffolded.)

For researchers: Know that once an outlet with **CESNUR**'s audience canonizes an antagonist, future scholarly exchange will be pre-filtered by that persona. If your work intersects with mine, expect the metonymy: debate me to debate you.

For oversight bodies: The move from argument to criminality imputation ("reported to police") and threat adjacency transforms a theological dispute into a potential public-order narrative. That's why logging, evidence preservation, and

proportionate checks on distribution are appropriate; reputational operations sometimes function as precursors to harassment or isolation of a target—or even murders and assassinations.

For the public: Elevation is not endorsement. It is a tactical necessity in advocacy communication: choose an opponent, fix the frame, and rally. Understanding the tactic helps inoculate readers against the reflex to read one face as the problem.

Now, if an adversary insists on giving you a megaphone, use it for clarity, not escalation:

1. **Stay in the lane of substance**: Keep returning to the argument that triggered the elevation—in this case, the philosophical and scriptural critique of reincarnation.

2. **Refuse the caricature**: Document and calmly correct inaccuracies; treating smears as data points (not identity markers) denies the frame its fuel.

3. **Distribute the spotlight**: Cite other scholars, survivors, and lines of critique so the "unified face" fractalizes back into a plural conversation.

4. **Archive and footnote**: Elevation thrives on narrative fog; meticulous citations—of theirs and yours—reduce fog to facts. (Here, the *Bitter Winter* URLs and masthead make the case themselves.)

I did not ask to be a banner. But when *Bitter Winter*—edited by **CESNUR**'s founder (who I identify as the 'Mephistopheles of the Age') and serving as its flagship

outlet—devotes a serial instalment to naming and pathologizing me, it confers what it seeks to deny: **salience, centrality**, and **symbolic weight**. The publication's choices—personal naming, public-order framing, and timing within a curated series—meet the very criteria by which movements manufacture a unified face of opposition. The irony is textbook: an attempted silencing that functions as an elevation.

The appropriate response is not triumphalism but steadiness: keep the focus on arguments, maintain evidentiary rigor, and refuse the bait of becoming only the caricature they sketched. If they insist on handing me a banner, it will be used, and used well—for accuracy, for accountability, and for the freedom to argue theology without being turned into a public-order fable. Here, Rosita Šorytė's pseudo-intellectual diatribe only reinforces the fact that Be Scofield and I have unequivocally won the argument against **AROLP** and **CESNUR** both; and in this, there is no coming back from the now entrenched truth that they have categorically ceded the intellectual, philosophical and theological ground completely over to us, in the process elevating the two of us as the proverbial Shiva and Shakti to their *maya* (illusion).

I struck in the dark at a faceless shade,

A cultic machine in the shadows laid!

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Speculative power, cloaked and concealed,

By Corvaglia's hand is now revealed!

The apologist mafia, dressed in disguise,

Sanitizes fraud with tolerant lies!

From ***CESNUR*** *to Bitter Winter's stage,*

They launder coercion as light for the age!

AROLP*'s rise was no random affair,*

Algorithms lifted it high in the air!

"Peace" and "awakening" masked the control,

A metastable cult with a managed soul!

Corvaglia proved what I long had guessed:

Lobbyists and clerics defend the "possessed!"

The Goal of the Wisecrack

Geopolitical shielding, far-right ties,

Narrative warfare in liberal guise!

And here they named me, with venom and spite,

A banner to rally their partisan fight!

Yet in naming they erred, for they gave me a stage,

The emblem, the face, the opponent of age!

They pathologized fatwas as visions and dreams,

Dismissed jurisprudence as hallucinant streams!

But caricature fails, for their libels reveal

The very fraud their discourse would seal!

Their trick is projection, the colonial game:

White voices as reason, the rest cast as shame!

The Goal of the Wisecrack

But Sa'id taught us well how this script was designed,

To bind Eastern voices as mad or confined!

So Bitter Winter has proven me right:

They've ceded the field in theology's fight!

If I am their banner, then let it be known,

The truth they foreclosed has already been shown!

They tried to erase, but instead they decreed:

The Shiva and Shakti to their maya creed!

The cult and its handlers, a metastable dream,

But we hold the counter-scripture supreme!

3: The Racist Coloniality of Rosita Šorytė's CESNURian Diatribe: White European Orientalist Discursive Violence as Apologia for Cults

The Goal of the Wisecrack

In Šorytė's two "parts" directed at me in her *Bitter Winter* screed there's a clear **racialized subtext** at work. When we strip away her rhetorical flourishes, what remains is a pattern: she frames me through classic Orientalist stereotypes, medicalizes my spirituality, and reduces my intellectual and juridical work to "hallucinations" induced by "plants," while simultaneously positioning herself and **CESNUR**'s European **cult mafia apologist network** as rational arbiters of what counts as "religion." This is a **racial hierarchy of credibility**: the white Catholic/European "scholar" gets to define legitimacy, while the Iranian-born thinker is cast as irrational, unstable, or dangerous. Nevertheless, the obvious racism is quite glaring.

Here she exhibits more than polemical hostility. Rather, she reproduces a distinctly Orientalist grammar of delegitimization that is thoroughly racist at its core. Edward Said, in *Orientalism* (Vintage Books: new York, 1979), demonstrates that European literature made possible the domination of the people of the 'East' because of the Orientalist discourse embedded within these texts.[24] In other words, by framing Eastern intellectuals and religious figures as exotic, irrational, or mystical, Western—and later international—power structures have long justified erasure, bombings, and genocidal violence while recoiling behind the façade of "the international community." Said also notes that "the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined,"[25] vividly capturing how such representations reduce the rich plurality of Eastern voices into a singular, consumable spectacle. This pattern is unmistakable in Šorytė's portrayal of my work. My juridical *fatwa* against **AROLP**—a

text grounded in Shīʿī and Bābī hermeneutical precedent (a precedent I explicitly mentioned and referenced at the very beginning of the prologomenon to *Wake Up!*)[26]—is reframed as "hallucinatory visions" induced by "plants," while my political-theological critique of **CESNUR** is caricatured as "conspiracy." That plants do not induce "hallucinatory visions," and to even say so is to reveal complete ignorance on the topic, is a discussion all unto its own.

Yet, in contrast, she positions **CESNUR**'s European Catholic and Christian Orthodox scholars as rational arbiters of what constitutes legitimate religion in contrast to my 'plant-induced hallucinatory visions', never once deigning to explain how one apparently gripped by such hallucinations such as I can write and reason with such lucid precision against her interests as I do. Nevertheless, the contrast she makes is an unmitigated racialized one: the Iranian-born critic is exoticized and pathologized, while the white European scholar is authorized. This ticks every last box that Edward Said vividly highlighted throughout his study.

But Šorytė goes further: she conjoins my heritage (Iranian, Muslim, Bābī-Azalī) with imagery of "hallucinogens" and "fantasies" in order to suggest that my interventions are not serious political-theological critiques but exoticized "visions." This is a classic colonial move—what Edward Sa'id mapped in his book: delegitimizing critiques from colonized voices by framing them as mystical, superstitious, or pathological. At the same time, she sanitizes **AROLP** (a group run by an Egyptian-American who deliberately plagiarizes from Bābī-Nuṣayrī Shīʿī sources)

as a "minority religion," erasing its fraudulent scripture, its authoritarianism, its documented criminality, with its coterie of geopolitical handlers (which Šorytė belongs to). The asymmetry is striking: my juridical *fatwa* is recast as "hallucination," while **AROLP**'s plagiarism is recast as "new religious creativity." Right here, Šorytė proves—through her own delusional method and even more foaming-at-the-mouth unhinged words—the European white-supremacist, colonial fabrication behind **CESNUR**'s handling of **AROLP**, where a hysterical 'Karen' such as her clumsily invents distinctions that she does not even properly grasp.

Thus, Rosita Šorytė's treatment of my work in her *Bitter Winter* screed is not merely dismissive—it is thoroughly racialized, revealing its crypto-fascist motivations throughout, never mind its seething ignorance. By framing my juridical *fatwa* and epistles as the "hallucinations" of a man experimenting with exotic plants, she deploys a well-worn Orientalist trope: the Muslim or Iranian intellectual as irrational mystic, incapable of sober analysis—never mind the fact that the mystics of Islam have usually been among the most incisive analysts on a litany of questions. Yet this is not accidental rhetoric but a discursive strategy. It is designed to strip my critique of its jurisprudential grounding in Shīʿī and Bābī precedent, instead casting it as an exotic aberration. In contrast, she positions European cult apologists such as Massimo Introvigne and Jean-François Mayer as rational authorities (never mind the fact that they know no Arabic, have no training in the tradition or its texts, and have probably never even read a single *fatwa* or an Islamic mystical text), thereby

reinscribing a racial hierarchy of credibility in which the **white Christian voice** is authoritative while the Iranian voice is targeted for discrediting, even though the tradition in question is Islamic to which Rosita Šorytė and her Catholic "Master" are perforce hostile to in whatever permutation or packaging it may come in unless it serves their larger monetary and political interests as **AROLP** does.

This racialization also functions here to obscure the substance of my critique. By exoticizing my use of visionary imagery, Šorytė avoids engaging with my central arguments: that **AROPL**'s scripture is fraudulent, its theology synthetic, its truth-claims hollow, and its persistence infrastructurally engineered for metastability. My identification of **CESNUR** as a laundering network for metastable cults is reduced to "conspiracy," while her own projection of order onto **AROLP**'s chaos is presented as neutral scholarship. The result is not an even a debate but a colonial framing: the *orientalized* critic is dismissed as irrational, while the white European apologist legitimizes a fraudulent sect. It is precisely this racial double standard that sustains **AROLP**'s shield of credibility in some sectors of Western discourse, which simultaneously proves it to be a **psy-op**. In short, her attack reveals her overtly racist, white supremacist motivations and that of **CESNUR**'s as well from top to bottom. Here we are dealing with hardened Fascist propagandists of the calibre of Julius Streicher (d. 1946) with *Bitter Winter* functioning as their version of *Der Stürmer*.

This racial double standard echoes what Talal Asad has called the **anthropological construction of Islam**. In *Genealogies of Religion* (Johns Hopkins

University Press: Baltimore, 1993), Asad notes that Muslims are often depicted as prisoners of belief, ritual, or mystical excess, in contrast to secular Western rationality. Šorytė deploys precisely this framing. By emphasizing "hallucinogenic plants" and "visions," she casts my interventions as irrational, even dangerous, while ignoring that the Bābī and Shīʿī traditions I explicitly draw upon are historically sophisticated systems of jurisprudence and hermeneutics. Her reduction of my *fatwa* to "hallucination" is thus not only polemical but **colonial in its logic** from beginning to end: it denies rationality and juridical agency to the Muslim or Muslim-adjacent critic while securing authority for white European interpreters only.

Scholars of race and religion have long observed how credibility is allocated along racial lines in modern discourse. Sylvia Wynter argues that Western epistemic authority rests on positioning the non-Western subject as the "irrational other," a manoeuvre that secures white European interpretive supremacy.[27] Šorytė's writing fits this pattern. By trivializing my juridical and political analysis as "visions" while validating **CESNUR**'s apologetics as scholarship, she enacts what might be called a **racial hierarchy of credibility**. The Iranian-born intellectual is dismissed as unstable; the European Christian apologist is affirmed as rational. This racialization is not incidental but instrumental: it enables the laundering of **AROLP**'s fraudulent so-called scripture and authoritarian practices by discrediting its most forceful critics.

Thus, the racist subtext in Šorytė's portrayal of me is part of a broader ideological operation. It is not simply personal animus but the reproduction of Orientalist discourse: the non-European critic is rendered mystical and irrational, while European apologists define the boundaries of legitimate religion. This discursive violence protects metastable cults like **AROLP** by shielding them from doctrinal and political exposure. To expose this is not merely to play identity politics but to name a structural asymmetry: the authority of right-wing white Christian apologists is secured by the racialization and delegitimization of critics from the Global South.

4: The Lacanian Frame of Rosita Šorytė's CESNURian diatribe: Subject, Other, and Fantasy

To read Šorytė psychoanalytically, we must situate her within Lacan's tripartite registers: the **Imaginary**, the **Symbolic**, and the **Real**.[28] In her *Bitter Winter* series, she attempts to stabilize her position within the Symbolic order of "legitimate scholarship." By invoking **CESNUR**, denouncing **FECRIS**,[29] and a parade of recognizable authorities, she anchors herself in what Lacan calls the "Name-of-the-Father"—the signifiers that guarantee authority. Yet the vehemence with which she delegitimizes critics such as I betrays a structural *anxiety*. The more she insists on "rationality" and "neutral scholarship," the more the cracks of the Real show

through: the threat that the fraudulent and metastable nature of **AROLP** will erupt beyond her control.

The Real, in Lacan's sense, is what resists symbolization. In this case, the Real is **AROPL**'s *fraudulence*: its plagiarized scripture, synthetic and ripped-off theology, and infrastructural protection. Šorytė cannot incorporate this Real into her discourse. Instead, she forecloses it. The signifier "fraud" is excluded from her Symbolic. But as Lacan teaches, what is foreclosed returns in the Real, in traumatic form.[30] Here it returns in the critiques, *fatwas*, and structural exposures she seeks to dismiss. Unable to name fraud, she resorts to symptomatic markers: "hallucination," "New Age," "conspiracy." These are not arguments but the scars of foreclosure.

For Lacan, the Imaginary is the register of the specular image, the coherent "I" constructed in the mirror. Šorytė's prose projects just such an image: the rational, stable, European scholar defending religious pluralism. But this self-image only holds together through the invention of an Other cast as irrational, mystical, or hallucinatory. In her text, that Other is me. By depicting me as the "hallucinated Oriental mystic," she displaces onto me the fragility of her own discourse. My supposed irrationality sustains her own image as the sober defender of reason. The "fraudulence" of **AROPL**'s scripture is the Real that Šorytė forecloses. She cannot name it without undermining the apologetic enterprise. The result is a compulsive resort to symptomatic language—"hallucination," "New Age," "conspiracy"—to cover the gap where the Real presses in. This foreclosure protects the cult's

fraudulent texts from juridical-hermeneutical exposure, even while the return of the Real erupts in the critics' interventions.

Her treatment of me, in particular, is marked by what Lacan describes as projection of *jouissance*[31] onto the Other. In her fantasy, I become the bearer of excessive enjoyment: the *hallucinator*, the *irrational mystic*, the *conspiracist*. She displaces onto me the very traits that destabilize her own symbolic authority. This is why she insists so strenuously on labelling my juridical *fatwa* a "hallucination," because for her the figure of the "irrational Oriental mystic" absorbs the anxiety she cannot resolve within herself: namely, that **CESNUR**'s apologetics are built on a foundation of narrative manipulation and selective blindness which it profits by: quicksand. Here we see what Lacan termed the "paranoid style" of discourse: the belief that the Other is plotting, destabilizing, harbouring excessive knowledge or dangerous enjoyment. By casting me as hallucinatory and conspiracist, Šorytė shores up her own ego-image (Imaginary) as a rational, stable scholar. Yet this projection reveals her dependency on the very figure she disavows. Without the "irrational Other," her identity as rational apologist has no ground—and where this specific debate is concerned, it collapses.

Now, the Symbolic, for Lacan, is the register of language, law, and authority. For Šorytė, the anchor of the Symbolic is **CESNUR** itself. Her constant appeals to Massimo Introvigne, Jean-François Mayer, and other cult apologists reveals her reliance on the "Name-of-the-Father" as a guarantor of her authority. By invoking

these figures, she inscribes her discourse within a law that claims scientific neutrality and pluralist defence. Yet this Symbolic is already compromised: it is less science than an ideological apparatus laundering metastable cults. Her reliance on it marks her subjection to the Master's discourse, which demands that radical critique be expelled as paranoia or hallucination. The metastability of **AROPL**—its infrastructural durability across digital platforms—is sustained not only by algorithms but by the Imaginary of the apologist. By projecting irrationality onto critics, Šorytė shores up the Symbolic order in which metastable cults are legitimized as "minority religions." Her discourse thus becomes part of the machinery that ensures metastability: the cult persists because the lobby apologist insists it *must* be seen as legitimate, this being both fallacy as well as circular reasoning.

That aside, Lacan insists that fantasy structures reality: it is not a veil over the truth but the very framework through which the subject sustains coherence. Šorytė's fantasy is that she is merely *claiming* to defend religious liberty against irrational anti-cult hysteria. In this fantasy, **AROLP** functions as the innocent minority religion, **CESNUR** as the *faux*-guarantor of pluralism, and us critics as dangerous paranoids. What this conceals is the Lacanian 'Real': the metastatic nature of cults like **AROLP**, their infrastructural protection, and their use as instruments of soft power. Her fantasy thus functions as a screen: it shields her from the unbearable recognition that she is not defending liberty at all but laundering

authoritarian cults. This is why she must caricature critics with racialized tropes and psychologizing insults. The stakes are too high to acknowledge the Real—that **CESNUR** operates as a **cult-apologist mafia**. And here as **CESNUR**, Introvigne, Mayer, and allied networks function as the Master's discourse in Lacan's schema, Šorytė's subjectivity becomes tethered to this Master, demanding its recognition and legitimacy. Her polemics against critics serve the Master by discrediting challenges, while her "rational" self-image masks the ideological function of laundering cults. The **cult apologist mafia**, therefore, becomes not just a network of institutions but also a psychic formation that subjects like Šorytė inhabit. In other words, an *egregore*.[32]

Lacan's concept of foreclosure (*forclusion*) is also helpful here. When a signifier is excluded from the Symbolic, it returns in the Real in traumatic form. For Šorytė, the foreclosed signifier is **fraudulence**: the recognition that **AROLP**'s scripture is counterfeit, its theology engineered, its durability infrastructurally managed by Šorytė's lobby employer. Unable to integrate this signifier into her Symbolic discourse, she forecloses it. As a result, it returns in the Real—in the form of critics, *fatwas*, and exposures that she must then cast as hallucinatory or conspiratorial. Her endless recourse to terms like "hallucination," "New Age," and "conspiracy" betrays this foreclosure. They are symptomatic eruptions of the Real she cannot domesticate.

The Goal of the Wisecrack

In *Seminar XVII*,[33] Lacan outlines the hysteric's discourse: the subject who interrogates and provokes the Master, demanding a guarantee of knowledge. Despite her official posture as a defender, Šorytė in fact occupies the hysteric's position vis-à-vis **CESNUR**. She demands of the Master: "*Tell me that I am a scholar, tell me that I defend liberty, tell me that I speak truth*." But because the Master she appeals to—**CESNUR**—is itself structurally compromised, this demand can never be satisfied. The unresolved anxiety manifests in the construction of hallucinatory enemies, paranoiac critics, and irrational Others. Lacan describes this paranoia as the projection of *jouissance*—excessive enjoyment—onto the Other. In Šorytė's discourse, I am portrayed as the bearer of such excessive *jouissance*: intoxicated, conspiratorial, driven by visions. By constructing me in this way, she externalizes the disavowed traits of her own discourse—the excessive faith in cults, the complicity with dubious networks with nexus to intelligence agencies, and the possible perks and financial remuneration she enjoys as a consequence of penning such screeds. Without this figure of the Other saturated with *jouissance*, her own identity as rational apologist cannot hold. Her image depends on the fantasy of an irrational, mystical critic.

For Lacan, fantasy is not an illusion covering reality but the very structure that sustains reality for the subject. Šorytė's fantasy is clear: she casts herself as the protector of minority religions, **CESNUR** as the *bastion of pluralism*, and critics as dangerous paranoids. This fantasy screens the truth: that she launders authoritarian cults through apologetic discourse. Her enjoyment (*jouissance*) derives from

occupying the role of defender while taking pleasure in the spectacle of the "delirious" Other. Thus, Rosita Šorytė's interventions in *Bitter Winter*, particularly **Parts 4** and **5**, are not merely polemical. They can be read as a symptomatic discourse in the Lacanian sense: a constellation of projections, fantasies, and defences that reveal more about her own subject-position in the apologetic apparatus of **CESNUR** than about the objects she claims to analyze. Through Lacan's categories of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, as well as his theory of discourse and foreclosure, her arguments appear less as neutral scholarship and more as the self-exposure of a divided subject.

In Lacanian terms, Šorytė's discourse reveals her as a divided subject ($), caught between her Imaginary self-image as a supposed rational defender of pluralism and the Symbolic demands of the **CESNUR** apparatus, while haunted by the Real of cult metastability and fraudulence. Her aggression toward me or Be Scofield is not incidental: it is the symptom through which she sustains her fantasy, especially since her fantasy is explicitly fuelled by her racism. By racializing, psychologizing, and pathologizing, she keeps the unbearable truth at bay. In the end, her writing is not an exposure of critics but a *confession* of her own structural dependency: without the figure of the "irrational Other," she cannot maintain her place within the Symbolic authority of **CESNUR**'s propaganda apologetics. At the level of fantasy, Šorytė positions herself as the defender of pluralism against paranoid attackers. This fantasy sustains her *jouissance* while concealing her

complicity in the testing of controlled messianism: the laundering of **AROPL** as a legitimate religious movement while it functions as a prototype for digital theocracy. Her enjoyment lies in imagining herself as protector, even as her discourse stabilizes a metastable cult whose absurd scripture and infrastructural protection are obvious instruments of 'soft power'.

Lacan designates the subject as divided ($), split between Imaginary identifications, Symbolic demands, and the eruptions of the Real. Šorytė's discourse reveals precisely such division. She clings to the Imaginary of rational scholarship, anchors herself in the Symbolic of **CESNUR**, and disavows the Real of cultic fraudulence. In racializing, psychologizing, and pathologizing critics, she confesses her inability to integrate the truth that returns in the Real: that **AROPL** is fraudulent, metastable, and that **CESNUR** is complicit. Her aggression toward critics is therefore not an exposure of their supposed irrationality but a symptom of her own structural dependency: without the irrational Orientalized Other, she cannot maintain her place in the Symbolic order of apologetics. A Lacanian reading thus makes explicit the psychic mechanisms by which fraudulent scripture is normalized, metastability is maintained, **cult apologist mafias** reproduce themselves, and controlled messianism is shielded from critique. Šorytė's aggressive racialization and pathologization of critics are thus not incidental insults but symptoms of a structural dependency: her discourse requires an "irrational Other" in order to stabilize the fantasy that she and **CESNUR** defend religious liberty when they don't—

in fact, the opposite. The psychoanalytic register therefore confirms what the juridical, theological, and political registers have already exposed: the apologetic discourse of *Bitter Winter* is not scholarship but a symptomatic defence formation sustaining metastable cults. Thus, the Lacanian analysis of Rosita Šorytė's discourse does not stand apart from the structural critique of **AROPL** and its apologists. On the contrary, it reveals the psychic economy that sustains the very apologetic machine.

She pretends with a mask of the scholar's grace,
Yet Orientalist tropes still darken her face!

She casts me as mystic, hallucinating, unwise,
While her white "authorities" arbitrate skies!

My fatwa in law she dismisses as dream,
"Plants and illusions"—her racialized theme!

*But fraud in **AROLP** she brands "creativity,"*
A laundering trick cloaked as "religious plurality!"

The Goal of the Wisecrack

Edward Said mapped this grammar before:

The East made irrational, to bar its door!

Sylvia Wynter showed how false reason is white,

The rest cast as shadows, deprived of their right!

She joins the old chorus, the Catholic refrain,

That Europe defines what is loss and what's gain!

The Iranian critic is Othered as wild,

The European apologist false reason's true child!

Yet her rhetoric confesses the truth she denies:

That ***AROLP****'s scripture is plagiarized lies!*

Her fantasy shields metastable control,

A cult in soft power, a laundering role!

The Goal of the Wisecrack

*So **Bitter Winter** reveals what it hides:*

Colonial violence, supremacist guiles!

Šorytė's diatribe, in Lacanian frame,

Projects her own cracks while assigning me blame!

Without the "irrational Oriental" foe,

Her rational mask would crumble and show,

*That **CESNUR** defends, through denial and spin,*

The fraud at the heart of the cults they keep in!

5: AROLP & New Age Cultism: A Forensic Takedown of Rosita Šorytė's *Bitter Winter* Series

Part I: The "New Age Anti-Cultism" Category

Šorytė's opening move in **Part 1**[34] is to announce the discovery of a "third camp" in the long-running conflict between new religious movements and their critics. Beyond the well-established categories of religious counter-cult activism (primarily

conservative Christian groups) and secular anti-cult activism (rooted in psychological, sociological, and legal frameworks), she proposes a novel third category: "New Age anti-cultism." By this she means a set of writers and activists—Be Scofield and myself foremost—who, while themselves committed to mystical or esoteric beliefs, nevertheless adopt a critical posture toward groups like **AROPL.**

The problem is that no such category exists in the scholarly literature. Decades of work by Eileen Barker,[35] David Bromley and Anson Shupe,[36] and others have mapped the field in consistent terms: *counter-cult* vs *anti-cult*. Within these camps there is heterogeneity—some anti-cult actors are secular humanists, others are clinicians or survivor-led NGOs, still others are religious but not Christian. But nowhere in the peer-reviewed record does one find "New Age anti-cultism" as a recognized typology. Its invention here functions rhetorically: it allows Šorytė to portray critics as hypocrites or internally incoherent, while discrediting them through association with fringe spirituality. It is an act of taxonomic delegitimization, not a descriptive contribution to scholarship. Nevertheless, besides being intellectually dishonest, the entire category is an uncritical invention by Šorytė herself, which she does not even attempt to critically flesh out.

The second structural problem in **Part 1** is the sourcing loop. *Bitter Winter* is itself a **CESNUR** publication, edited by Massimo Introvigne, the most prominent NRM apologist of the past three decades.[37] Šorytė's references to **FECRIS**, Russia, China, and Israel are drawn overwhelmingly from **CESNUR**-aligned venues: *The*

Journal of CESNUR, *Bitter Winter* itself, and **Human Rights Without Frontiers** pieces co-authored by **CESNUR** affiliates. Independent academic or governmental confirmation is thin to non-existent. The result is an echo chamber effect. When she writes, for instance, that "court rulings in Japan and Korea have proven alliances with Chinese intelligence," she cites no case names, no docket numbers, no jurisdictions. A reader attempting to verify the claim independently will find the trail loops back only to **CESNUR** publications. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence; here there is no evidence at all. Zilch; *nada*!

Šorytė also distorts the timeline of coverage. She suggests that the *Guardian*'s July 2025 investigation[38] was parasitic on "a slanderous blog" by Be Scofield. In fact, while Scofield did publish an exposé in April 2025 on her platform **GuruMag**,[39] the *Guardian* investigation was newsroom-driven: it involved multiple reporters, interviews, document reviews, and video evidence. Subsequent UK press—including *The Telegraph*[40]—relied on the *Guardian*, not Scofield, for corroboration. To portray the *Guardian*'s work as derivative is textbook poisoning of the well: delegitimizing mainstream reporting by tying it to an allegedly *unreliable* blogger.

Another sleight-of-hand is her treatment of secular anti-cult actors. She elevates Roger Ikor,[41] a French polemicist from the 1980s, as if he embodies the entire secular anti-cult movement. She then pivots to a recently published book by scholar Stephen Kent, lifting its most provocative psychobiographical passages (on Ezekiel and Muhammad) to claim that secular critics pathologize religion wholesale.

In fact, Kent's work is contested, and mainstream psychiatry explicitly warns against this kind of pathologization. The **APA's DSM-5 Cultural Formulation Interview**[42] and related guidance documents are designed precisely to help clinicians distinguish normative religious experience from pathology. By cherry-picking Ikor and Kent, Šorytė smuggles in a **strawman**: the idea that secular critics think all spirituality is mental illness.

To her credit, some factual elements in **Part 1** are correct. Russia's 2017 ban on Jehovah's Witnesses is well-documented, as is the Russian Orthodox Church's alignment with Putinist state repression. The structure of China's anti-xie-jiao apparatus, with the United Front Work Department and the Ministry of Public Security overseeing the "China Anti-Cult Association," is accurately described.[43] **FECRIS** did indeed drop its Russian Orthodox affiliate in 2023.[44] But these "solid bits" are consistently framed in tendentious ways. The Russia example is wielded to suggest that any anti-cult activism shades into state repression; the China example to imply that critics of **AROPL** are aligned with **CCP** persecution. The **FECRIS** example becomes a cudgel against secular NGOs writ large.

What is missing is crucial. Not once does Šorytė summarize the concrete findings of the *Guardian* investigation: children calling the leader "God," families urged to surrender income, miracle-cure videos. Instead, she abstracts the debate into a taxonomy war.[45] Readers are left with no sense of what **AROPL** actually does. The methodological problems are therefore severe: invented categories, self-

referential sourcing, circular reasoning, cherry-picked polemicists, and tendentious use of true facts to obscure the concrete allegations at hand. The verdict on **Part 1** must be that it is advocacy journalism for **CESNUR**'s apologetic agenda, not a serious mapping of anti-cult discourse.

Part II: Identity Smears & Ad Hominem

If **Part 1** of Šorytė's series was about erecting a new taxonomy, **Part 2**[46] turns its firepower on personalities—specifically, on the journalist **Be Scofield**. It is here that her strategy of poisoning the well comes into full view. Rather than engaging with the evidence Scofield has gathered about **AROPL** or other high-demand groups, she devotes the bulk of her essay to ridiculing Scofield's gender identity, spirituality, and sources of income. This is character assassination masquerading as analysis, never mind that almost all of Šorytė's personal smears against Scofield are obviously concocted without any proof.

The most glaring example is Šorytė's decision to deadname Scofield—speculating about her "legal name" and linking that to supposed psychological instability. I also legally changed my name as of August 2004 as a public declaration of my permanent rift with my family's Bahāʾism with my unequivocal adherence to the Bayān (i.e. Azalī Bābism, which is Bahāʾism's first and permanent historical rival), and Šorytė is more than welcome to solicit local attorneys here in Queensland,

Australia to petition the state government via the **Queensland Department of Births, Deaths and Marriages** for verification to that end. Yet in journalistic ethics, this line of attack is indefensible. The **Associated Press stylebook**,[47] the **GLAAD media reference guide**,[48] and the **Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics**[49] all agree: a transgender person's chosen name and pronouns should be used, and references to prior names made only when absolutely necessary for legal context. Here, there was no such necessity. The intent was stigmatization. Worse, Šorytė goes further, insinuating that Scofield's reporting may be clouded by "*psychotic episodes due to gender dysphoria*." This is factually wrong and discriminatory, never mind possibly being legally actionable as a defamatory statement of libel. The **World Health Organization** formally removed gender incongruence from the list of mental disorders in its **ICD-11** classification,[50] and both the **American Psychiatric Association** and the **American Psychological Association** affirm that being transgender is not itself a disorder.[51] What Šorytė offers is not analysis but the recycling of harmful stereotypes while fully letting the mask slip by clearly revealing herself as a reactionary fascist and far-rightwing culture warrior.

From there, **Part 2** repeats the invented category of "New Age anti-cultism." Once again, this is not a term found in the literature. To call Scofield a "New Age anti-cultist" because she practices Reiki or consults the Akashic records is as meaningless as calling Eileen Barker a "Christian anti-cultist" because she happens to belong to the Church of England. Personal belief does not constitute a scholarly

category, nor does it invalidate reporting that is corroborated by independent investigation. Yet Šorytė treats it as a master frame: if Scofield believes in angels, her journalism must be unreliable. That is a straight *ad hominem* fallacy as well as a red herring.

The irrelevance of Scofield's spirituality becomes clear when one recalls how the *Guardian* built its July 1, 2025 exposé of **AROPL**: by interviewing former members, analyzing financial records, reviewing hours of video, and speaking with local officials. None of this involved Scofield's mystical experiences. Independent mainstream outlets do not rely on tarot decks or channellings; they rely on documents, testimony, and fieldwork. To suggest otherwise is a category mistake designed to smear—again, revealing Šorytė to be disingenuous and intellectually dishonest.

Šorytė also cherry-picks Scofield's book *Hunting Lucifer* (2022), highlighting passages about angelic visions while ignoring the broader corpus of her investigative work. In fact, Scofield has been cited by or worked alongside mainstream outlets that later corroborated her leads—whether in relation to *Love Has Won*, *Agama Yoga*, or now **AROPL**.[52] By focusing exclusively on the mystical color in her memoir, Šorytė creates the impression that all of Scofield's journalism is equally "delusional." It is like judging Ida B. Wells' anti-lynching reporting solely on the basis of her personal religious testimonies and ignoring the investigative facts.

The piece further indulges in innuendo about funding. Šorytė hints darkly that "someone paid her thousands per month" to write, as if this proves hidden agendas. But all freelance journalists receive income from somewhere. Unless there is evidence that such funding was conditional on particular coverage, the fact of being paid proves nothing. This is the guilt-by-association fallacy: suggesting corruption without demonstrating it, never mind that Šorytė has zero evidence for her claims.

Another tactic is the misuse of scholarly disputes. According to Šorytė, Scofield once called Eileen Barker "the mother of all cult apologists."[53] Šorytė seizes on this insult to suggest Scofield cannot be trusted. But whether one agrees with Scofield's epithet or not, Barker's standing is secure: she is an Officer of the Order of the British Empire, a Fellow of the British Academy, and founder of **INFORM**, a charity regularly consulted by government and civil society.[54] If true, the insult says something about Scofield's polemical style—ours being sometimes far worse than hers—not about the validity of her reporting. By elevating the slur into the centrepiece of her argument, Šorytė once again avoids facts. But as we said, there are reasons to remain incredulous regarding the attribution.

The ethical failures of **Part 2** are then compounded by its disregard for professional standards. The **SPJ Code of Ethics**[55] instructs journalists to "minimize harm" and "avoid stereotyping." Šorytė's focus on gender identity and spirituality does the opposite: it stereotypes and maximizes harm. The Code also instructs

writers to "distinguish between news and commentary." **Part 2** blurs the line entirely, presenting character smears as if they were neutral reporting. Most important is what **Part 2** omits. Nowhere does Šorytė engage the empirical question: do **AROPL**'s practices raise red flags of coercive control? The *Guardian*'s July 2025 investigation, supported by follow-ups in *The Telegraph*, presented concrete findings: demands that members turn over income; children referring to the leader as divine; immigration authorities in Sweden raising alarms about educational neglect. These facts do not depend on Scofield's angels or Reiki. They are verifiable claims that should be addressed head-on. But they never appear in Šorytė's text.

The verdict on **Part 2** is therefore clear. It is not a rebuttal of criticism, but an attempt to destroy the critic. It traffics in identity-based stigmatization, relies on invented categories, employs *ad hominem* attacks, and avoids engaging the substance of the allegations against **AROPL**. By any scholarly or journalistic standard, it fails.

Part III: Delusional Journalism

If **Part 2** was about deadnaming and *ad hominem*, **Part 3**[56] escalates the strategy into outright pathologization. The title itself—"*Be Scofield's Delusional Journalism*"—signals the move. Where a serious critic would interrogate Scofield's evidence or methods, Šorytė instead brands her "delusional" and "megalomaniac," terms with heavy

psychiatric freight but no clinical or legal grounding. This is not analysis; it is name-calling dressed up in pseudo-diagnostic rhetoric.

The Pathologizing Frame

Šorytė's rhetoric here exemplifies what philosopher Ian Hacking once called "making up people":[57] treating contested categories of behaviour as if they were psychiatric types. "Delusional" is not a casual adjective—it is a diagnostic criterion in the DSM.[58] To use it without clinical authority is irresponsible. Nor does she cite any psychological literature, court judgment, or expert evaluation to support it. Nor is she qualified. The label functions instead as shorthand for "I find her claims implausible." But implausibility and delusion are not the same thing. When applied polemically, such language stigmatizes without argument.

The irony is that **CESNUR**-affiliated publications like *Bitter Winter* routinely resist pathologization of religious minorities, insisting that unorthodox beliefs should not be medicalized. When defending Falun Gong or Shincheonji, the line is clear: mysticism is religion, not madness. Yet when the critic of an NRM reports mystical experiences, suddenly the same language—"delusional," "hallucinatory"—is wielded against her—and me. This is the double epistemic standard at the core of the series revealing its complete self-serving hypocrisy.

The Orcas Island Case: Selective Retelling

Part 3 also hinges on a 2006 tragedy on Orcas Island, Washington: the death of Carla Shaffer, wife of a follower of Aaravindha Himadra.[59] The case was controversial. Law enforcement leaned toward accident or suicide, but locals and relatives voiced suspicions of cult involvement. Scofield later covered the case as part of her reporting on Himadra.[60]

Šorytė presents the narrative as settled: Scofield, she claims, misrepresented sources, fabricated quotes, and ignored affidavits proving the leader's innocence. Her evidence? An affidavit from David Lutz, hired by Himadra's circle, swearing that Scofield misquoted him.[61] But affidavits are not judicial rulings. They are one party's statement, offered in legal form but not tested by cross-examination. No court ever found Scofield guilty of defamation. Nor does Šorytė acknowledge that Scofield herself published contemporaneous notes and emails in *Hunting Lucifer* supporting her version. What we have is a *he-said-she-said* scenario—yet Šorytė presents it as if one affidavit settled the matter.

Even more troubling is the conflict of interest she never discloses: the detectives whose report she cites were retained by Himadra's supporters. To present their findings as neutral truth is tendentious. An honest analysis would have acknowledged the contestation: law enforcement ambiguity, family suspicions,

Scofield's claims, the leader's denials. Instead, Šorytė sanitizes the history to delegitimize the critic.

The "Megalomania" Trope

Another tactic in **Part 3** is to claim that Scofield exhibits "megalomania" because she portrays every group she investigates as "the largest" or "world-threatening." For example, calling **AROPL** "the largest doomsday cult in the world," or predicting that Agama Yoga would "end in a pile of ashes."

This argument collapses rhetoric into pathology. Activists often use hyperbole: abolitionists spoke of slavery as the greatest evil in the world; environmentalists call climate change an existential threat; never mind that in the piece Šorytė herself is engaging in hyperbole. One may critique Scofield's hyperbolic style, but to label it "megalomania" is to misapply a clinical category. Scholars of NRMs such as Eileen Barker and James Richardson have long cautioned against conflating activist rhetoric with mental illness. What Šorytė calls "megalomania" is better described as polemical flourish.

Violence, Attribution, and Bad Faith

The Goal of the Wisecrack

The most serious insinuation in **Part 3** is that Scofield's writing incited violence. She points to two cases. First, in Kauai, Hawaii, where local residents protested **Love Has Won's** attempt to settle on the island, leading to vandalism and threats. Second, in Sedona, Arizona, where Bentinho Massaro reportedly received death threats after Scofield published exposés about his community.[62]

Here Šorytė blurs correlation into causation. Local Hawaiian officials themselves stated that the backlash against **Love Has Won** was rooted in longstanding indigenous resistance to mainland spiritual movements. Scofield's reporting may have drawn attention, but the protests were triggered by the group's own arrival and behaviour. As for Massaro, Scofield explicitly condemned the threats against him, even as she stood by her critique of his teachings. To equate "critical reporting" with "incitement to violence" is a category error. By that logic, investigative journalism about corrupt corporations could be blamed for every protest, boycott, or vandalism that followed. The responsibility of a journalist is to report facts; the responsibility for threats lies with those making them.

Šorytė's framing—"hate speech that may incite violence"—is inflammatory. It mirrors the very tactic **CESNUR** usually decries when states accuse NRMs of "incitement." Again, the double standard is stark: when critics are accused, the label sticks; when NRMs are accused, **CESNUR** cries persecution; and whenever **AROPL** unequivocally incites to murder and violence, **CESNUR** remains silent and defends them instead.

The "Fear-Mongering" Charge

Another line of attack is that Scofield "generates fear in towns." She cites cases where communities became alarmed after her exposés, as if this proves her journalism unethical. But the metric of journalism is not whether it calms communities, but whether it is accurate. If a factory is polluting a river, reporting on it may generate fear—yet that fear is justified. Likewise, if **AROPL** or **Love Has Won** exhibits coercive practices, awareness may alarm neighbours. Fear is not *ipso facto* proof of distortion. The proper question is whether the facts are correct. On that, Šorytė is silent.

Independent Corroboration Ignored

Perhaps the most striking omission in **Part 3** is the independent corroboration of Scofield's reporting. **Love Has Won** was later covered extensively by *Vice*, the BBC, and Netflix, all of which confirmed abuses Scofield had flagged.[63] Agama Yoga's abuses were documented by **Danish Broadcasting Corporation** and **Thai media**.[64] The *Guardian* built its **AROPL** exposé on interviews and documents that paralleled Scofield's earlier claims. To ignore this trail is to pretend Scofield exists in a vacuum.

The truth is more complex. Scofield's style is indeed activist and hyperbolic just like mine; she does blur memoir and investigation. But the core of her

allegations has again and again been borne out by mainstream outlets. To dismiss her wholesale as "delusional" is to dismiss facts already validated by independent reporting.

Logical Fallacies at Scale

Part 3 is a catalogue of fallacies:

- **Ad hominem**: "delusional," "megalomania," "one-woman operation."
- **Strawman**: treating mystical metaphors as literal evidence standards.
- **Appeal to consequences**: blaming her for violence instead of testing truth.
- **Guilt by association**: treating affidavits from accused parties as definitive.

What it never does is engage evidence.

What an Honest Critique Would Require

A good-faith critique of Scofield's work would:

1. Lay out the Orcas Island case neutrally, including why law enforcement ruled as they did, why families disagreed, and what Scofield reported.
2. Acknowledge the conflict of interest in Himadra's hired detectives.

3. Separate stylistic hyperbole from factual claims.
4. Test Scofield's allegations against later independent reporting.
5. Avoid stigmatizing psychiatric labels unless backed by clinical or judicial authority.

Šorytė does none of these. Instead, what she does in **Part 3**—pathologizing critics, sanitizing cults, weaponizing psychiatric language—**CESNUR**'s network of apologist academics performs in practice. As Scofield shows in her recent **GuruMag** piece, these are not separate phenomena but two arms of the same machine:

- One arm (**academic conferences, "scholarship," Bitter Winter articles**) manufactures legitimacy.
- The other arm (**direct cult collaboration, smear campaigns, survivor erasure**) enforces protection for authoritarian leaders like Abdullah Hashem.

Together, they form what can only be called an **academic-cult symbiosis**—a closed circuit in which cult leaders supply access, money, and status, while scholars launder their image and punish the cult's critics.

Thus, **Part 3**, like its predecessors, is not analysis but apologetic polemic. It pathologizes its subject, cherry-picks affidavits, imputes causality for acts of violence without proof, and refuses to touch the central question: are Scofield's

allegations about coercive control in groups like **AROPL** true or not? Until it confronts evidence rather than demonizing the messenger, it reads not as scholarship but as advocacy for high-demand groups under scrutiny. Indeed, its evasions mirror precisely the tactics Scofield documents in her exposé: minimizing survivor testimony, attacking critics with psychiatric labels, and substituting rhetoric for data. By parroting the talking points of groups under fire while ignoring a mounting record of abuse allegations, *Bitter Winter* transforms itself from a purported scholarly ejournal into little more than a cheap online **PR** rag for authoritarian sects and their handlers.

She forged a new camp no scholar has named,

"New Age anti-cultists," unfairly framed!

A taxonomy trick, a rhetorical spin,

To smear the critics, not reckon with sin!

Her sources loop back in a self-made hall,

***CESNUR** citing itself, no courts at all!*

The Goal of the Wisecrack

The Guardian's work she claimed as derived,

Yet documents, interviews—hard facts—arrived!

Then Part Two descended to smears and to shame,

Deadnaming, ad hominem, tarnishing names!

She mocked Scofield's angels, her Reiki, her pay,

While ignoring the evidence brought into play!

To call a reporter "delusional, mad,"

Is pseudo-diagnosis, irresponsible, bad!

A DSM label without any ground,

A tactic of stigma where no proof is found!

She twisted a death on Orcas's shore,

Yet affidavits can settle no score!

The Goal of the Wisecrack

She blamed Scofield's words for vandal and threat,

But truth-telling's duty is honesty met!

Vice, BBC, Netflix, and press worldwide,

Confirmed the abuses her writings supplied!

Agama, Love Has Won, AROPL too—

Mainstream inquiry proved much of it true!

So what do we see when the mask is unveiled?

Not scholarship's rigor, but advocacy veiled!

Apologia dressed as a learned review,

A PR machine for authoritarian few!

Part IV: "Wahid Azal's Hallucinations"

If **Parts 2** and **3** targeted Be Scofield, **Part 4**[65] turns its rhetorical artillery on me. The strategy is the same: pathologize, ridicule, and caricature instead of engaging

substance. The title alone—"Anti-Cult Hallucinations"—frames the entire exercise as psychiatric dismissal rather than intellectual debate. Šorytė does not weigh any of my critiques of **AROLP** or my theological arguments; she seeks to render them laughable, a set of "visions" and "drug-fueled delusions." Yet, when examined closely, the piece reveals not the weakness of my critique but the complete poverty of Šorytė's method and findings.

Opening with a picture of me during my presentation for the 2018 **1st Berlin Occulture** conference, where I talked about Islamic Theurgy;[66] in **Part 4** she begins by saying, "Scholars who publish work about **AROPL** often receive emails from a man named Wahid Azal." She is referring to my **8 July 2025** email to Holly Folk, which I publicized on my blog.[67] To wit,

> **From: N.W. Azal**
> **Date: Tue, Jul 8, 2025 at 1:45 PM**
> **Subject: Academic Concern Regarding Your Appearance in AROLP-**
> **To: Holly Folk**
>
> Dear Dr. Folk,
>
> I am writing in response to your recent appearance in the video titled "*AROLP, Cult Accusations & the Fight for Religious Freedom*" (YouTube, 7 July 2025), where you appear as a guest alongside representatives of the group known as the **Ahmadi Religion of Light and Peace (AROLP)**.

The Goal of the Wisecrack

As an independent scholar, translator, and long-standing spiritual practitioner—deeply engaged in comparative mysticism and critical cult studies—I found your participation in this video deeply troubling. **AROLP** is not merely a minority religion under scrutiny; it is, as I and others have documented, an **algorithmically-driven ideological startup** exhibiting many hallmarks of coercive control, spiritual gaslighting, and digital radicalization masked under post-Islamic language.

Over the past months, I have publicly released extensive documentation concerning AROLP's activities—including a recent **attempted infiltration of my life** by a woman possibly affiliated with a local subcontractor representing the group under a false identity, which led to an attempted emotional, spiritual, and reputational destabilization which was luckily thwarted. I believe this event formed part of a **pattern of psychological entrapment and informational gathering** that mirrors tactics employed by other new religious movements **CESNUR** (that you are also affiliated with) has historically defended.

Please see these public records of concern:

- *The Forensic Unveiling of a Fabricated Identity*: https://wahidazal303.blogspot.com/2025/07/the-forensic-unveiling-of-fabricated.html
- *A Short Psychological Profile Essay on the Tactics Used*: https://wahidazal303.blogspot.com/2025/07/a-short-psychological-profile-essay.html
- *"False Light: The Rise of Spiritual Operators as Vectors of State Control"* (Substack essay): https://wahidazal303.substack.com/p/false-light

These experiences, supported by further documentation, suggest that AROLP operates not merely as a spiritual group but as a **digitally**

engineered cultic framework embedded in broader soft-power and epistemic control mechanisms.

Your affiliation with **CESNUR** is of course well known, and I am familiar with the complex debates around religious freedom, stigma, and the term "cult." However, as critics such as Luigi Corvaglia, Steve Hassan, and others have observed, **CESNUR**'s work often crosses a line from scholarly defense into **active laundering of authoritarian religious systems**.

Hence, I ask respectfully:

- Were you fully aware of the nature of AROLP before agreeing to appear?
- Were you provided with independent sources or testimonies of those harmed by its activities?
- Do you not see a conflict between legitimate defense of minority religions and the enabling of **digitally cloaked coercion and grooming**?

I hope you are someone who values scholarly integrity and are not merely another ideologically captured mouthpiece in the Academy for imperial soft power subterfuge. I hope this message prompts further inquiry. I also append my two monographs regarding the group.

Sincerely,
N. Wahid Azal
Independent Scholar

If this email to a purportedly public scholar in response to her public appearance on a YouTube video elicited a police intervention or visit, it is pretty clear that law enforcement authorities in the jurisdiction of complaint may have determined it completely frivolous and so shelved it, since it meets no legal test or

threshold in any jurisdiction that I am aware of—and especially not in the UK nor the United States of Folk's residence—for either harassment, never mind "implications of violence," as Šorytė delusionally opines. Here, as the explicit evidence of the publicized email proves, it becomes patently obvious that the 'hallucinations' Šorytė accuses others of are all completely her own. Furthermore, there was only a single individual involved among the scholarly community in any communication regarding **AROLP** initiated by me—Holly Folk herself—and not *recipients* (plural) as Šorytė dishonestly states. Strawman down!

As for the "Spider's House," comment: indeed, I said it, and I stand by it—and it was said to one of the online acolytes of the Russian Fascist **Aleksandr Dugin**, no less, on a website managed by them that had *doxxed* me in 2016, and whose networks at the time were sending explicit death threats to my late wife and I in Berlin, Germany, over our anti-fascist activism against Dugin's networks in Berlin. Rosia Šorytė and **CESNUR** are more than welcome to contact German law enforcement authorities over this matter, since a huge preexisting police file already exists on the whole case (especially our complaints), given that suspicions over my late wife's mysterious death in our Berlin flat on the night of 11-12 March 2019 revolves around it. Here Rosia Šorytė is showcasing as evidence against me material originating on a website linked to a network of dubious criminal state-actors who are suspected of the possible murder by poison of Kirsten Roya Azal (d. 2019): my late wife.[68]

Now, Rosita Šorytė's biography on the *Bitter Winter* site states:

The Goal of the Wisecrack

> Rosita Šorytė joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania. She has been posted to the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to UNESCO (Paris, 1994-1996), to the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 1996-1998), and was Minister Counselor at the Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations in 2014-2017, where she had already worked in 2003-2006. In 2011, she worked as the representative of the Lithuanian Chairmanship of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) at the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (Warsaw). In 2013, she chaired the European Union Working Group on Humanitarian Aid on behalf of the Lithuanian pro tempore presidency of the European Union. As a diplomat, she specialized in disarmament, humanitarian aid and peacekeeping issues, with a special interest in the Middle East and religious persecution and discrimination in the area. She also served in elections observation missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Belarus, Burundi, and Senegal.

Given her political pedigree, how is it that Rosita Šorytė, who has publicly denounced Russia's war on Ukraine, now rushes to defend hoodlums tied to Aleksandr Dugin by extracting information from their *doxx* blog[69]—acolytes of the Kremlin's "Rasputin" and one of the loudest cheerleaders for Putin's so-called "special operations" in Ukraine long before it began? The contradiction is glaring. By aligning herself on this point with Dugin's circle—the very milieu implicated in fomenting the war in Ukraine—Šorytė places herself uncomfortably close to the forces possibly complicit in my late wife's suspicious death in Berlin during 2019.

Very fishy indeed. Has she let slip a guard, revealing connections or knowledge previously hidden? This dissonance raises serious questions, and perhaps German investigators should now examine whether Šorytė's misstep inadvertently opens a new trail—one that could even lead back to **CESNUR** itself. If birds of a feather flock together; then, clearly, fascists of the same feather likewise do the same. **CESNUR**, Rosita Šorytė, and the Dugin Russian-state nexus! This is something definitely worth looking further into.

Pathologization Through Headline

The very choice of the word "hallucinations" is telling. It collapses a broad range of practices—mystical visions, entheogenic sacraments, polemical imagery—into the clinical register of psychosis. But mysticism has long been treated as a legitimate subject of scholarship. William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*[70] emphasized that visions are central to religious life. Henry Corbin, Sudhir Kakar, and Robert Forman all warn against reducing mystical testimony to psychiatry. By branding my Simorgh visions[71] or entheogenic practices as "hallucinations," Šorytė positions herself outside the mainstream of religious studies and squarely in the polemical camp of ridicule, never mind revealing herself as a non-specialist.

The irony, again, is that *Bitter Winter* frequently treats the visions and revelations of new religious movements as valid religious phenomena. Falun Gong

practitioners' accounts of seeing Falun or Shincheonji's prophecy timelines are never called "hallucinations." When defenders of NRMs recount supernatural experiences, they are treated as sacred testimony. When critics do the same, they are dismissed as insane. In itself, this double epistemic standard and hypocrisy undercuts the credibility of the entire series.

Selective Quotation and Suppressed Context

Šorytė carefully selects the most exotic elements of my writings to maximize strangeness: visions of the Simorgh, ritual *tongue-piercing* with the Zulfiqar (don't know where she got that from), Syrian rue entheogenic sacraments. She cites these without context, presenting them as proof of irrationality. Yet there is an extensive academic literature on precisely these phenomena.

- **Entheogens in religion**: Scholars such as Carl Ruck, Dan Merkur, and Beatriz Labate have documented the use of psychoactive plants in Sufi, Hindu, and Christian traditions. Syrian rue (*Peganum harmala*) has known entheogenic properties and a documented history in Iranian mystical practices.[72] To present my entheogenic work as idiosyncratic "drug trips" is disingenuous.[73]
- **Visionary literature**: The Simorgh,[74] a mythical bird of Persian cosmology, is a central figure in Suhrawardī's *The Simorgh's Shrill Cry*, ʿAttār's *Conference of*

the Birds as well as Ferdowsī's *Shāhnāmeh* (The Epic of the Kings) and has been treated as a symbol of divine unity by countless Sufis and scholars of Sufism. To dismiss references to the Simorgh as "hallucinatory" is to erase entire lineages of Zoroastrian as well as Persian Islamic mysticism.

Šorytė also suppresses historical context. The Bābī–Azalī lineage to which I adhere has been acknowledged by serious historians whether Denis MacEoin, Abbas Amanat, Todd Lawson, or others as surviving well into the 20th century. She is more than welcome to look through my public works for the evidence, or Peter Lamborn Wilson's (Hakim Bey) final two publications. Whether or not one agrees with my interpretations, my claim to stand in this tradition is not invented. The Bahāʾī administrative machinery once made this bogus claim, and fell flat on their faces for making it, because their own scholars disputed it. Moreover, on what criteria or evidence does Šorytė even assert this? My claim to the Bābī–Azalī lineage is on far, far more solid ground than Abdullah Hashem's regarding a Ahmad al-Hasan (d. 2009) that he never even actually met, let alone being his successor. By erasing this continuity where I am concerned, Šorytė distorts the intellectual genealogy, not to mention that (as with everything else) she has no clear idea what she is talking about. Instead, she should press Abdullah Hashem to produce verifiable proof that he ever even physically encountered Ahmad al-Hasan.

The "Violent Threat" Trope

Another rhetorical move is to portray me as violent, which betrays her racist dog *whistling* when she attempts casting the brown Middle Eastern dissident as 'violent. She cited the comment in which I described 'myself as "the Spider itself" and then claims that I threatened to disclose Bahāʾī contacts to Iranian authorities. Since I am actually a dissident to the present Iranian regime, and possess over 30+ years of documented activism to that end—never mind publicizing a *fatwa* against the regime in 2022 during the height of the '**Woman, Life, Freedom**' uprising[75]—I doubt Iranian authorities would even take me seriously if I even tried. Context also matters here. Such language was part of a polemical exchange in the midst of bitter ideological conflict, where a long preexisting history of Bahāʾī persecution, murder and assassination of Azalī Bābīs exists. Yet I have never been prosecuted for my political stance against Bahāʾīsm (which I likewise consider to be a cult). There has never been any police finding, nor any judicial ruling has ever treated it as a literal criminal threat. To treat heated rhetoric as evidence of violence is tone-policing, not analysis. Religious polemics across history have been florid and hyperbolic: al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) called the Ismāʿīlīs heretics deserving damnation; Martin Luther (d. 1546) denounced the Papacy as the Antichrist. Polemical vitriol does not make one violent.

The Gatekeeping Fallacy

Šorytė also leans on authority figures who say my Sufi practices are "New Age syncretism" that "real Sufis would not recognize." Milad Milani is cited in this regard.[76] First, Milani seriously erred in his written classification and later explicitly apologized in email to me when I called him on it. But, second, Sufi history itself is one of constant syncretism and contestation. The Chishtiyya Order of India incorporated Hindu practices; the Mouride Order in Senegal fused Islamic and local traditions. Many Sufi movements were dismissed by contemporaries as heterodox, only later to become mainstream. To say that "many Sufis would not recognize" my practice proves nothing; it merely describes the dynamic of innovation in Sufism.[77] Besides my Sufism and Azalī Bābīsm, it so happens that I also claim the Shakta Tantra tradition of South India as well. That said, gatekeeping by a know-nothing political hack and racist cult apologist is not rebuttal.

Conspiracy as Caricature

Perhaps the most sensational element is Šorytė's treatment of my critique of **CESNUR**. Indeed, I have written polemically about Sabbatian–Frankist afterlives, linking **CESNUR**'s apologetic stance to deeper currents of heterodox Jewish messianism and Catholic geopolitics. One may dispute the argument, but it has intellectual roots. Gershom Scholem, Moshe Idel, and Pawel Maciejko all traced the

afterlives of Sabbatian and Frankist currents into European occultism and modern politics.[78] To reduce my critique to "hallucinatory paranoia" about a "secret army" is to caricature rather than engage, especially since I offered analytical evidence, citations, and mentioned the name of the late Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (d. 2012), who I was in communication with during the early '00s and who thought along the same lines.

The same distortion applies to the issue of reincarnation. I critique reincarnation as both theologically incompatible with *tawḥīd* and sociologically weaponized by cults ("*your karma caused your abuse, so you must not complain*"). This is not a delusion. Major Islamic theologians from Ibn Ḥazm (d. 994) to al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) rejected reincarnation. Scholars of coercive groups (Janja Lalich, Steven Hassan) have documented how reincarnation doctrine has been used to justify exploitation.[79] Šorytė presents my position as absurd, when in fact it rests on both classical theology and survivor testimony. The lack of knowledge by this so-called expert is also quite glaring when she says: "*What is new is Azal's conspirationist claim that "reincarnation upholds extremely negative political and social implications, and as such, as a belief, it would implicitly cultivate authoritarian and abusive cult frameworks and paradigms*." As a friend put it, *This is a very old phenomenon, going back to both Hinduism and Jainism, with both promising rebirth into higher casts in your next life if you obey them in this life. Islam challenged that on the Indian subcontinent, just like you have challenged AROPL.*[80]

Yet, to be fair, so did Vedanta and Buddhism. For Vedanta, if there is only one, single transmigrant, i.e. the *atman*, then no one rebirths into anything, including members of the higher castes. In Buddhism, there is no-self/*anatman* and thus by implication popular notions of reincarnation are by inference denied by Buddhism itself. Be that as it may, as I stated earlier in public on the first perusal of the *Bitter Winter* screed, my critique of reincarnation has struck a particular nerve with **AROLP** and **CESNUR** because it dismantles reincarnation at the precise joints where **AROPL**'s false authority and narrative depend on it: **(i)** philosophically, via Mullā Ṣadrā's account of substance, identity, and resurrection rather than transmigration; **(ii)** theologically, by restoring the Bāb's *rajaʿ* (return) as theophanic return of the Divine Names, not the shuttling of souls; and **(iii)** politically, by showing how reincarnation doctrine functions as a tool to defer justice and normalize control. Faced with that, apologists chose caricature over argument, effectively ceding the intellectual and philosophical ground to me and admitting their own intellectual inadequacy in answering the argument.

Antisemitism by Innuendo

Another tactic is guilt by association. Because I have read or referenced Julius Evola or Aleister Crowley, Šorytė suggests my critiques slide into antisemitism, even connecting me to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This is innuendo, not evidence. My

writings distinguish carefully between Judaism as a faith, Sabbatian/Frankist heterodoxies, and political Zionism. By collapsing these distinctions, Šorytė erases nuance in order to smear while fully aligning herself with Netanyahu and the Israeli far-right who insist on collapsing such distinctions.

The CESNUR Double Standard

The sharpest irony is that my central charge—that **CESNUR** functions as an apologetic lobby for NRMs—is not fantasy. **CESNUR** has been accused by multiple independent scholars, including Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Stephen Kent, of cozying up to controversial groups, accepting hospitality, and downplaying abuses. **FECRIS** and European parliamentary debates have likewise flagged **CESNUR**'s role as a lobbying apparatus.[81] I may frame this in polemical terms ("**Sabbatian–Frankist Outreach Front**"), but the underlying suspicion is not invented out of thin air. By refusing to acknowledge this literature, Šorytė presents **CESNUR** as an innocent victim while portraying critics as paranoid.

Furthermore, as I showed by publicizing one of Abdullah Hashem's own secret writings,[82] the Sabbatian-Frankist label very much fits since the *semen fixation* and hyper-sexualization in abundant evidence in his doctrine directly evokes the precise same doctrines in Frankist iterations of Sabbatianism. All of this was sourced and analyzed in the *Goal of the Unwise*. The reader is referred over to that monograph.

What an Honest Critique Would Require

A good-faith critique of my position would:

1. Acknowledge the polemical style while separating rhetoric from substantive claims.
2. Engage the literature on entheogens in religious traditions rather than dismiss them as "hallucinations."
3. Recognize the contested but real survival of Azalī lineages into the modern era.
4. Treat theological critiques (reincarnation, eschatology) as positions within Islamic debate, not as "hallucinations."
5. Disclose **CESNUR**'s institutional interests in defending **AROPL**, which colors Šorytė's narrative.

None of this is done. Instead, ridicule replaces argument.

Verdict on Part 4

Part 4 is not scholarship. It is an institutional hit piece designed to delegitimize me through pathologization, cherry-picked quotations, and innuendo. By mocking

visions as "hallucinations," depicting polemics as violence, and caricaturing intellectual genealogies as paranoia, Šorytė avoids and deflects the hard questions: what is **CESNUR**'s role in shielding controversial movements, and what evidence supports critiques of **AROPL**? Her refusal to engage confirms the suspicion that **CESNUR** responds to criticism not with transparency but (like all cultic networks) with smear campaigns.

Part V: "'New' and 'Old' Anti-Cultists"

The final installment of Šorytė's series attempts to draw the threads together. Having caricatured Be Scofield as delusional and myself as hallucinatory, she now positions both of us as examples of what she calls the "lunatic fringe" of anti-cultism. The rhetorical strategy is clear: reduce critics to objects of ridicule, fold them into an existing caricature of "paranoid style," and then declare the debate closed. Yet, like the earlier parts, this conclusion depends less on evidence than on smear, innuendo, and double standards.

Ridicule as Closure

Opening with a picture of me taken in 2008 near a local sacred Aboriginal site in the Gold Coast hinterland, **Part 5** starts by framing Scofield and myself as figures whose writings amount to "hallucinations" and "fantasies." This is not neutral description.

It is the culmination of the series' pathologizing arc: "delusional," "megalomaniac," "hallucinatory," now "fantasists." The cumulative effect is to suggest that critics of **CESNUR** and **AROPL** are not just wrong but mentally unfit. In rhetoric, this is known as the delegitimization-through-pathology tactic. By ridiculing the messenger, the message need not be engaged. The pattern across the series is consistent:

- **Part 1: invent a new category ("New Age anti-cultism").**
- **Part 2: deadname and stigmatize Scofield.**
- **Part 3: brand her "delusional" and blame her for violence.**
- **Part 4: mock my mystical system as hallucination.**
- **Part 5: fold both of us into Hofstadter's "paranoid style."**

The formula is: caricature → pathologize → delegitimize → dismiss.

Misrepresentation of the Fatwa

A particularly tendentious example is her treatment of my *fatwa* against Abdullah Hashem. She presents it as evidence of lunacy: "numerological ravings" directed at a harmless religious figure. Perhaps she ought to first look inside the so-called *Goal of the Wise* itself before saying anything further. But what she omits is crucial: my

appeal to the writings of the Bāb (d. 1850) and Ṣubḥ-i-Azal (d. 1912), the two originating central figures of Azalī Bābism (with me now as the third), was a doctrinal rebuttal rooted in a recognized scriptural corpus. Within Shiʿi and Bābī traditions, issuing such a legal-theological opinion is not hallucinatory—it is standard polemical practice. Nor is numerology (*abjad* analysis) a random eccentricity—unless Šorytė wishes to level the same charge at Hashem as well. Jewish, Islamic, and Christian traditions all have long histories of *gematria* and letter-mysticism. My comparisons between names like "Abū'l-Kāẓib Hāshim" and "Sabbatai Zevi" may be polemical to her, but they follow recognizable historical patterns of numerological operation. To dismiss them as "adding and subtracting numbers randomly" is to misrepresent an entire tradition of mystical exegesis, which Šorytė proves she knows nothing about.

Selective Quotation of Polemical Hyperbole

Šorytė also quotes some of my deliberately fiery language—calling Hashem "the devil incarnate" (actually, I didn't, because I have reserved that label exclusively for Massimo Introvigne himself) or warning academics of judgment—as if these were literal threats. But heresiographical literature is replete with such rhetoric. Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) wrote polemically of the Ismāʿīlīs; Martin Luther (d. 1546) railed against the Pope; Jewish polemicists castigated Sabbatians. Hyperbole and polemic

are standard registers of religious controversy, which **CESNUR**'s **AROLP** client itself regularly engages in.[83] Yet to strip these words of their rhetorical context and present them as literal evidence of mental instability is bad-faith decontextualization.

The Aum Shinrikyō Caricature

One of the more curious moves is her dismissal of my linkage of **CESNUR** with *Aum Shinrikyō*. She treats it as false—**CESNUR** was founded after *Aum Shinrikyō*'s heyday, therefore I am wrong. But that one of **CESNUR**'s founders publicly fled to the defense of *Aum Shinrikyō*'s after their Tokyo subway sarin gas attack in the Tokyo in 1995, is a matter of public record. That **CESNUR**, even before its official founding, has functioned as an apologetic apparatus that shields controversial groups such as *Aum Shinrikyō*, in the same way that apologists might shield a destructive movement, has been documented far and wide.

For example, the **CESNUR** Wikipedia entry[84] highlights that board member J. Gordon Melton and conference speaker James R. Lewis—both associated with **CESNUR**—publicly defended *Aum Shinrikyō* shortly after the sarin gas attack. They even flew to Japan and held press conferences, arguing that the group lacked the ability to produce sarin, and suggesting it was being scapegoated. Furthermore, in an academic critique, scholar Ian Reader responded to Massimo Introvigne's

sympathetic or apologetic remarks about *Aum Shinrikyō* by stating that the incident demonstrated how some scholars may promote whatever narrative their patrons prefer, even when evidence contradicts them. This commentary implies that CESNUR figures adopted rhetoric aligned more with defense than objective assessment, not to mention underscoring the fact that they were very much involved with the ordeal.[85]

That aside, the suspicion that CESNUR functions as a shield is not baseless. Independent scholars and institutions—including Stephen Kent, Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, and debates in the French Parliament—have accused CESNUR of apologism and close ties to groups facing abuse allegations.[86] One may dispute details, but to literalize my critique into some chronological error is yet another a proven strawman, never mind being a barefaced lie.

Misuse of "Conspirituality"

Šorytė also invokes the term "conspirituality," coined by Ward and Voas in 2011 to describe the blend of conspiracy theory and New Age spirituality. By lumping Scofield and myself into this category, she positions us alongside QAnon and other internet conspiracists. The rhetorical effect is to make us indistinguishable from far-right fantasists. But conspirituality literature itself emphasizes that it arises from real-world distrust of institutions. Not all critiques of power are "conspirituality."

To apply the label to Scofield and myself ignores the substantive conflicts of interest they highlight: **CESNUR**'s echo chamber, *Bitter Winter*'s apologetic stance, and the concrete abuses alleged against **AROPL.** To collapse this into "QAnon-like paranoia" is to avoid engaging with substance.

The Hofstadter Citation

The capstone of **Part 5** is the invocation of Richard Hofstadter's famous essay on the "paranoid style in American politics."[87] Scofield and I are cast as paranoids whose ideas are dangerous precisely because mainstream institutions sometimes take us seriously. But here, again, the analogy is flawed. Hofstadter was critiquing McCarthy-era right-wing politics, not mystical polemics or survivor-led journalism. To apply the label to critics of NRMs is a category error. Moreover, Hofstadter himself cautions that not all conspiracy claims are paranoid; some are rooted in genuine institutional misconduct. By citing Hofstadter while ignoring his nuance, Šorytė weaponizes the "paranoid style" trope to foreclose inquiry.

Guilt by Association with FECRIS

Another line of attack is guilt by association. She notes that Luigi Corvaglia, a **FECRIS** board member, cited me approvingly. She then links both Corvaglia and I to Alexander Dvorkin, the Russian Orthodox counter-cultist, as if all three were part

of the same reactionary network.[88] This is misleading. Corvaglia's citation of me was specific: he found my critique of **CESNUR** insightful. That does not make me a Dvorkin ally. By blurring these distinctions, Šorytė avoids the harder question: why did Corvaglia, a respected secular critic, find Azal's **CESNUR** analysis useful?

The Hidden Double Standard

The most glaring feature of **Part 5** is its double epistemic standard. Mystical experiences and supernatural claims are treated as legitimate religious testimony when they come from NRMs **CESNUR** defends. Falun Gong's *qi* cosmology or Shincheonji's prophecy is "faith." But when critics employ mysticism—Scofield's angels, my Simorgh—they become "lunatic hallucinations." Mysticism for NRMs is sacrosanct; mysticism for their critics is pathology. This is not scholarship; it is institutional bias, never mind being a transparent joke.

The "Mysterious Benefactors" Innuendo

Part 5 concludes with insinuations that Scofield and I may be funded by "handlers" or "mysterious benefactors" to attack NRMs. No evidence is provided. The irony is thick: Šorytė herself is funded by **CESNUR** and accuses her critics of conspiracism while she floats a baseless conspiracy theory about our funding. This reveals the projection at the heart of the series: the smear of "conspiracy" is wielded precisely

while advancing conspiratorial innuendo and simultaneously engaging in one for remuneration.

What an Honest Conclusion Would Look Like

An honest conclusion to the series would have looked very different. It would have acknowledged that Scofield and I are polemical, rhetorically charged, and at times mystical. It would then have asked the empirical questions:

- Were Scofield's allegations about **AROPL** corroborated by the *Guardian* and others? (**Yes.**)
- Have scholars criticized **CESNUR** for apologism? (**Yes.**)
- Do my theological positions have precedent in Islamic thought? (**Yes.**)

It would have also disclosed *Bitter Winter*'s own institutional ties to **CESNUR**. And it would have left readers to evaluate arguments on their merits rather than pathologizing critics.

Verdict on Part 5

Part 5 as conclusion does not rebut criticism of **AROPL** or **CESNUR**. It ridicules the critics, misrepresents their polemics, and invokes Hofstadter to close debate. But in

doing so it reveals its own bias. By relying on ridicule, double standards, and innuendo, it confirms what the series set out to deny: that *Bitter Winter* and CESNUR function less as dispassionate scholars of religion and more as apologists for controversial groups.

They call my critique "hallucination,"

A smear in place of fair disputation!

No argument weighed, no substance addressed,

Just ridicule wielded to silence the rest!

My email to Folk was plain, polite,

Yet Šorytė frames it as menace, as fright!

Strawmen abound, distortions grow,

While evidence offered she will not show!

Visions dismissed as "delusion, insane,"

Though mystics and scholars have long made the same!

The Goal of the Wisecrack

Simorgh and rue, traditions deep,

Not idle "drug trips" nor fevered sleep!

She cites Dugin's men, their doxxing and lies,

Ignoring the blood and the death that implies!

The file in Berlin still shadows the night,

Yet she allies with fascists and calls it insight!

From Aum to ***AROLP*** *the pattern is clear,*

Apologia cloaked as "scholarship" here!

Kent, Beit-Hallahmi, parliaments too,

All noted the lobby that ***CESNUR*** *runs through!*

And when at the end she cries "lunatic fringe,"

It's rhetoric hollow, a closing hinge!

The Goal of the Wisecrack

For ridicule's mask cannot cover the fact:

This "scholarship" smears, but the evidence lacks!

So if visions are mocked and polemics despised,

The bias of Bitter Winter's exposed, not disguised!

Apology dressed as a learned review—

A shield for the cults, not a search for the true!

Conclusion

Bitter Winter has positioned itself as a "*human rights*" magazine devoted to reporting on religious freedom, but its editorial line is consistently shaped by the orbit of **CESNUR** and its advocacy for new religious movements—cults. In practice, its coverage often employs polemical caricature of critics, attributing to them sinister motives or psychological defects while presenting its favoured movements in an exclusively positive light. This style of rhetoric transforms what could be serious analysis of complex phenomena into weaponized propaganda—an exercise in branding opponents as enemies of freedom and reducing nuanced disputes to moral absolutes.

The Goal of the Wisecrack

The Nazi weekly *Der Stürmer*, published by Julius Streicher between 1923 and 1945, represented an extreme form of such propagandistic reduction. It specialized in lurid caricatures, demonizing depictions of Jews, and scandal-mongering "exposés" that blurred fact and fiction in order to incite hatred. *Der Stürmer* did not merely report news but actively manufactured a climate of hostility in which the targeted group was consistently portrayed as a threat to society's very survival. *Bitter Winter*, of course, does not employ the openly racial antisemitic tropes of *Der Stürmer*, yet there are instructive parallels in its tactics: selective quotation, distortion of adversaries' arguments, racialization, and an obsessive focus on "unmasking" enemies who are depicted as delusional, dangerous, or conspiratorial.[89]

What unites the two is the mode of polemical propaganda masquerading as journalism. Both substitute vilification for balanced reporting, and both deploy repetition of stock themes—be it the "cult apologist" narrative in *Bitter Winter* or the "eternal Jew" in *Der Stürmer*—in order to shape public perception. In each case, the aim is not dialogue but delegitimization, not critique but eradication of credibility. Whereas *Der Stürmer* worked in the service of state power, *Bitter Winter* operates in the service of particular ideological and institutional interests, yet the rhetorical mechanics are strikingly similar: a relentless campaign of stigmatization that collapses complexity into caricature.

The Goal of the Wisecrack

Across five installments, Rosita Šorytė's *Bitter Winter* series purported to analyze the "rise of New Age anti-cultism" in relation to **AROPL.** What it delivered instead was a case study in advocacy journalism: a polemical defense of a controversial movement that pathologized its critics while avoiding the central questions. The consistent rhetorical patterns reveal themselves when the series is read as a whole.

The Recurring Strategies

1. **Inventing categories to delegitimize**
    - The introduction of "New Age anti-cultism" as a third camp in the anti-cult landscape was not grounded in any peer-reviewed literature. Scholars from Barker to Bromley and Shupe have long mapped the terrain as counter-cult (largely Christian) versus secular anti-cult. By fabricating a new taxonomy, Šorytė could lump critics like Be Scofield and myself into a delegitimizing box: "hypocritical mystics" whose spiritual beliefs supposedly disqualified their criticism.
2. **Reliance on the CESNUR echo chamber**
    - Throughout the series, references loop back to *Bitter Winter*, the *Journal of CESNUR*, or co-authored **Human Rights Without Frontiers** pieces. Claims of "court-proven alliances with Chinese intelligence" lacked

docket numbers or case references; allegations about Korean groups "often cooperating with China" traced back only to **CESNUR** itself. Self-referential sourcing is not independent evidence.

3. **Pathologization and *ad hominem***
    - Scofield was deadnamed, her gender identity stigmatized, and her mystical experiences presented as evidence of delusion. My Simorgh visions and entheogenic practices were branded "hallucinations." Loaded psychiatric labels—"delusional," "megalomania," "hallucinations"—were applied without clinical basis by unqualified individuals. In place of analysis, the series substituted psychiatric smear.
4. **Cherry-picking extreme voices**
    - A single polemicist (Roger Ikor, 1980) and controversial interpretations in Stephen Kent's 2025 book were elevated as if they represented the entire secular anti-cult camp. This ignored the diversity of clinicians, survivor NGOs, and scholars who explicitly warn against pathologizing religion.
5. **Avoidance of the empirical question**
    - At no point did Šorytė engage with the actual findings of the *Guardian*, *Telegraph*, or similar investigations into **AROPL**: children calling the

leader "God," financial demands, homeschooling clusters, and miracle-cure videos. These are observable facts, not theological abstractions. Her silence on them is perhaps the most telling omission.

6. **Double epistemic standard**
    - When NRMs defended by **CESNUR** describe visions or revelations, these are treated as religion. When critics describe visions or mystical frameworks, they are dismissed as insanity. Mysticism for NRMs = faith; mysticism for critics = pathology. The bias could not be clearer.
7. **Appeal to ridicule and innuendo**
    - The final part culminated in accusations of "hallucinations," "fantasies," and "mysterious benefactors," with no evidence provided. Critics were folded into Hofstadter's "paranoid style" as if they were QAnon adherents. Yet the innuendo about "handlers" paying Scofield or myself is itself conspiratorial. The projection is striking.

What an Honest Series Would Have Done

A serious examination of "anti-cult movements" in relation to **AROPL** could have been valuable. An honest series would have:

- **Defined terms from the literature**: Start with the established counter-cult vs anti-cult typology rather than inventing "New Age anti-cultism."
- **Engaged the facts on the ground**: Summarize the *Guardian*'s documented findings and then rebut them, if possible, with verifiable counter-evidence.
- **Provided precise citations**: If alleging "court rulings" linking critics to foreign intelligence, supply case names, jurisdictions, and holdings. None were given.
- **Avoided self-citation loops**: Use independent academic and governmental sources for claims about **FECRIS**, Russia, and China.
- **Respected ethical standards**: Refrain from deadnaming, stigmatizing, or ridiculing critics' identities and beliefs.
- **Disclosed conflicts of interest**: Acknowledge that *Bitter Winter* is a **CESNUR** publication with a long history of advocacy for NRMs—cults.

Such an approach would have elevated the debate, forced critics to clarify evidence, and offered readers a real map of the contested terrain. Instead, Šorytė produced a five-part polemic that was more about silencing dissent than understanding it. Unfortunately, her polemic is so bad that is reveals more about her and the venue publishing the piece than about those it sets out to demonize.

The Goal of the Wisecrack

This matters far more than just **AROPL**. The entire field of new religious movement studies sits at the contested intersection of scholarship, advocacy, and safeguarding. Survivors and journalists have long accused **CESNUR** of apologism. Governments and NGOs have sparred over whether anti-cult activism protects vulnerable people or veers into repression. Against this backdrop, credibility matters. When **CESNUR** affiliates resort to caricature, innuendo, and pathologization, they confirm suspicions of bias.

For scholars, the lesson is caution. Polemics do not build credibility. For journalists, the lesson is to seek independent verification and to resist attempts to delegitimize critics by identity-based smears. For the public, the lesson is to read carefully: ask whether a piece engages facts, whether it cites independently verifiable sources, whether it respects ethical boundaries. If not, it should be treated as advocacy, not scholarship, and so treated similar as to toilet paper.

Given this, the *Bitter Winter* series on "New Age anti-cultism" fails every test of serious analysis. It invents categories, relies on an echo chamber, cherry-picks extreme voices, avoids empirical questions, and smears critics by pathologization. It concludes not with evidence but with ridicule. Readers seeking a serious understanding of **AROPL** and the anti-cult landscape should look elsewhere: to Barker's pioneering sociology of NRMs, to Bromley and Shupe's comparative typologies, to survivor testimony and clinical literature on coercive control, to Be Scofield's penetrating journalism, to independent reporting like that of *The*

Guardian, and to my two previous monographs—and now this one. Only by engaging the facts directly—without caricature, without innuendo—can the debate move forward. Until then, Šorytė's five-part polemic stands less as a guide to anti-cult movements than as a cautionary tale: how advocacy masquerading as analysis can corrode credibility, obscure abuses, and leave the public in the dark about the very practices that most require scrutiny. Fortunately, it is Šorytė who has eviscerated her own credibility—and not ours—whilst clearly revealing herself as a racist, a transphobe bigot, and a complete ignoramus to boot.

The bottom line is clear: Rosita Šorytė's latest screed in *Bitter Winter*, coupled with **AROLP**'s staged selfies alongside utterly compromised pseudo-scholars at their English compound, is about one thing only—**CESNUR**'s bet on **AROLP** is failing, and the dividends they expected are not coming in. Their malicious attacks are, in fact, a public admission that my two monographs struck their mark and rattled them to the core—which was precisely the intent. That **CESNUR** now scrambles to drag **AROLP**'s chestnuts from the fire with these spectacles shows the desperation of an operation collapsing under shifting geopolitical realities.

For us, this is because Israel's 12-day war on Iran failed spectacularly in its primary aim of regime change while Trump's strike on Iran's nuclear program, piggybacking off Israel's, inflicted only surface damage. Meanwhile, retaliatory Iranian missile strikes devastated great swathes of Israel, showing the regime not to be any military pushover, permanently altering the deterrence balance in the region

thereby. Add to this the tsunami of global outrage at Netanyahu's livestreamed genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza—blatant atrocities that Abdullah Hashem, Abū'l-Kāẓib, himself has in at least one YouTube video not so subtly defended in Israel's favor by advising Gazans to voluntarily leave and ethnically cleanse themselves out of Palestine[90]—and the writing is on the wall. **CESNUR** and its **cult apologist network** are backing a loser, their own fortunes are also beginning to wane as a result, and so their frantic theatrics only proves it—never mind the fact that we have now also clearly identified them as a fascist-adjacent network that should be on the permanent radar of **ANTIFA** everywhere, whether in Italy, Lithuania, or elsewhere. For our part, we will continue to hammer them in our public writings until they finally go down for the **count of 10**.

Epilogue

Let Rosita Šorytė now attempt to rationalize her way out of the total demolition of her credibility and reputation here at our hands. At this point, 'plant induced hallucination' may remain her only plausible refuge from the metaphorical grave in which **CESNUR** too now lies entombed intellectually as well as reputationally. As such, we await with eager anticipation for any future responses by **CESNUR**, its *Bitter Winter* mouthpiece, or even **AROLP** itself, for each will be subjected to the same unflinching demolition, allowing us to expand the archive of their defeats and with

it the expansion of our own publication tally. We are neither intimidated by these corrupt bullies, racist hacks and obvious spooks, nor are we inclined to grant them quarter; for in this war for the soul of the world, we do not negotiate, appease, or take prisoners. Let Luigi Corvaglia, Be Scofield, **FECRIS**, and all who resist falsehood stand shoulder to shoulder with us, for together united we shall indeed prevail over these malevolent spawns of deception, who masquerade as scholars but serve the demiurge of control. And let **CESNUR** and Massimo Introvigne—never mind **AROLP**—be placed on formal notice: there are now many eyes upon them across the globe, not least within the law enforcement and intelligence communities of Australia. What is at stake here is not merely the exposure of one propagandist, but the defense of truth itself against its algorithmic counterfeiters.

This struggle, however, transcends **CESNUR**, *Bitter Winter*, or **AROLP**. It is the visible symptom of a far older war: whether power will continue to weaponize knowledge, psychiatry, and scholarship as instruments of domination, or whether truth will break these chains and stand revealed. What is being tested here is not merely the credibility of one propaganda organ, but the possibility of human beings to speak without being captured, to think without being colonized, and to live without being pathologized. To expose this machinery is to strike at the root of an imperial deceit that for centuries has sought to erase the very memory of divine disclosure from the world.

The Goal of the Wisecrack

For this reason, the battle is not ours alone. It calls forth a fellowship of those unwilling to bow to the counterfeit light of algorithmic idols. Let scholars of conscience, seekers of truth, and guardians of memory stand together in this work of unmasking deception. Let them form an architecture of resilience stronger than any machine, viral in its circulation, unassimilable by the demiurge of platforms. Only united can we repel the corrosive enchantments of pseudo-scholarship and build living traditions of resistance that carry the spark of true revelation forward.

And so we declare: **CESNUR**, Massimo Introvigne, Rosita Šorytė, and the false prophets they cultivate stand exposed before heaven and earth. Their manipulations are numbered, their deceptions are written in the **Book of Judgment**, and their counterfeit light shall be extinguished by the **Fire of the Living**. For God is the Avenger of the oppressed, the Compeller of the arrogant, the Light that no demiurge can simulate. In this war for the soul of the world, we neither compromise nor take prisoners. What is at stake is truth itself—and against its counterfeiters, we march beneath the banner of the All-High, certain of victory. Amen!

Let false priests falter, their idols decay,

The Fire of Heaven has swept them away!

The Goal of the Wisecrack

We bow not to shadows, nor flatter a lie,

Our banner is Truth and it blazes on High!

Let ***CESNUR*** *now tremble, its mask torn apart,*

For Light has prevailed and has burned through the dark!

And the Light be upon those who follow the illuminations of the guidance unto the Truth!

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20th of Wilāya NUR 20

Wednesday, 27 August 2025 CE

Notes

[1] Translation:

It is the Compeller, the Subduer!

Glorified is the One Who encompasses all things in knowledge, and subdues the creatures with might and judgment! To Its Majesty submit both ascent and descent, and to Its grandeur bow the Spirit and the realm of Dominion! It is the One from whom no fugitive escapes, and whom no sought-after thing can thwart! In Its Hand are the keys of the unseen and the destinies of decrees! Blessed, then, is God, the Lord of the worlds—the One unchanged and unchangeable—and It is the Subduer above Its servants, and Its is the All-Wise, the All-Compelling!

And may all the curses of God be upon all the oppressors and the arrogant, from before and after; and may the blessings and salutations of God be upon all of Its Chosen Ones, from before and after! And the Splendor from God be upon the illuminated ones, and praise be unto God, the Light of all the worlds!

[2] The following is an augmented version of the earlier post-publication item published under the same title, online https://www.academia.edu/129849599/Postpartem_to_The_Goal_of_the_Unwise_Cultic_Apologism_Digital_Cloaking_and_the_Rise_of_the_Meta_Theocratic_Machine (retrieved 26 August 2025).

[3] See "*Luigi Corvaglia of FECRIS: Research on CESNUR and Massimo Introvigne*," https://scientologymoneyproject.com/2023/03/06/luigi-corvaglia-of-fecris-research-on-cesnur-and-massimo-introvigne/ (retrieved 26 August 2025).

[4] Otherwise known as the *so-called* Ahmadi Religion of Light and Peace.

[5] Online, https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/10134012 (retrieved 25 August 2025).

[6] To which I owe an immense debt of gratitude to **Be Scofield** for first pointing out to me this earth shattering trilogy on X/Twitter; see, https://www.luigicorvaglia.com/en/post/fascists-spies-and-gurus-the-cult-apologists-network-part-i

https://www.luigicorvaglia.com/en/post/fascists-spies-and-gurus-the-cult-apologists-network
https://www.luigicorvaglia.com/en/post/the-cult-apologist-mafia-part-iii (retrieved 9 June 2025).

[7] https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/10134012 (retrieved 9 June 2025).

[8] See, for example, the search results from **CESNUR**'s own website https://www.google.com/search?q=site%3Awww.cesnur.org+Baha%27i (retrieved 9 June 2025).

[9] Particularly given the fact that, as of this writing, Trump and Netanyahu have both already publicly pivoted, committed as well as mobilized American and Israeli military, intelligence and media resources towards a forced regime change war on Iran.

[10] See Gershom Scholem, and especially his monumental *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1975).

[11] Many studies have been published on the Frankists since Scholem's time, but we still prefer to send the reader (especially the non-specialist) over to his *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: And Other Essays On Jewish Spirituality* (Shocken Books: New York, 1999), and particularly the essay entitled '*Redemption through Sin*': 78-141.

[12] See our CounterPunch piece from that period, "*The Mirage of Monarchical Salvation: Reza Pahlavi and Media Spectacle of the Israel-Iran War*," online https://www.counterpunch.org/2025/06/20/the-mirage-of-monarchical-salvation-reza-pahlavi-and-media-spectacle-of-the-israel-iran-war/ (retrieved 25 August 2025).

[13] https://www.gurumag.com/meet-the-shadowy-scholars-supporting-englands-doomsday-cult/ (retrieved 25 August 2025).

[14] See https://www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/0824/anth42s10foucault39.pdf (retrieved 25 August 2025).

[15] Translated by the French by Richard Howard (Vintage Books edition: New York, 1988): *x*.

[16] Ibid., *vi*.

[17] See "*Michel Foucault: power, knowledge and discourse*," online https://1library.net/article/michel-foucault-power-knowledge-and-discourse.y9g7n0vq (retrieved 25 August 2025).

[18] The following is a somewhat augmented version of a blog post, see https://wahidazal303.blogspot.com/2025/08/when-opponent-makes-you-banner-how.html (retrieved 25 August 2025).

[19] Online https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/10131653 (retrieved 25 August 2025).

[20] As the digital footprints of our online virtual war with them should prove to the discerning, the Haifan Bahā'īs are exactly the same. In fact, their entire pantheon of "Covenant Breakers" is precisely this very thing: curated opponents.

[21] **Part 1** https://bitterwinter.org/aropl-and-the-rise-of-new-age-anti-cultism-1-the-anti-cult-movement/

Part 2 https://bitterwinter.org/aropl-and-the-rise-of-new-age-anti-cultism-2-the-making-of-be-scofield/

Part 3 https://bitterwinter.org/aropl-and-the-rise-of-new-age-anti-cultism-3-be-scofields-delusional-journalism/

Part 4 https://bitterwinter.org/aropl-and-the-rise-of-new-age-anti-cultism-4-walid-azals-anti-cult-hallucinations/

Part 5 https://bitterwinter.org/aropl-and-the-rise-of-new-age-anti-cultism-5-new-and-old-anti-cultists/ (retrieved 25 August 2025).

[22] See especially *Goal of the Unwise*, *ibid.*, 5-10.

[23] For the record, we should also note here that in its hyphenated form, this term—*Sabbatian-Frankist*—was one originally popularized by an American Orthodox Jew: Rabbi Marvin Antelman (d. 2013). Antelman explicitly frames Frankism as an offshoot or radicalization of Sabbateanism, using *Sabbatian-Frankist* in his conspiratorial exposés—most notably in his multi-volume work *To Eliminate the Opiate*, which was fully referenced in our previous two monographs. In his writings and interviews, he often referred to contemporary ideological allegiances as being carried forward by "Sabbatian-Frankist" currents—or even "satanic Sabbatian Frankists," see,
https://www.winterwatch.net/2024/08/the-influence-of-sabbatian-frankism-on-the-world/ (retrieved 25 August 2025). That the popularization of this term originates with a prominent American Jew and 'Semite', cancels out any underhanded suggestions that the term is 'Antisemitic'. The fact that Sabbatianism, whether in its original form or in its Frankist iteration, continues to both unsettle as well as form the object of recurrent denunciations by countless orthodox Jews (and even by many liberal and reform Jews as well) up to the present time, proves the point, making it unassailable and so thoroughly immune to such intellectually dishonest characterizations and canards. Instead, and given Lithuania's well documented history of Antisemitism (whether before, during or after the Holocaust) it stands to reason that perhaps the real Antisemite is actually the one making the accusation, especially as the history of antisemitic racism in Lithuania is well

documented, see Darius Staliūnas *Enemies for a Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania under the Tsars,* Historical Studies in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, vol. 3 (Central European University Press, Budapest, 2015) and "*Antisemitism in Lithuania in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,*" in *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews*, edited by Alvydas Nikžentaitis, Stefan Schreiner, and Darius Staliūnas, (Rodopi: Amsterdam/New York, 2004): 231–260; Azriel Shohat "*Antisemitism in Lithuania*," *Yad Vashem Studies* 2 (Yad Vashem: Jerusalem, 1958): 119–150; Human Rights Monitoring Institute. *Summary of the Study: Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Lithuania – Focus on Jewish and Roma Communities.* (Human Rights Monitoring Institute: Vilnius, 2023); Michael Shafir "'*Double Genocide' and Its Discontents*," in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*, edited by Randolph L. Braham and András Kovács, 403–446; George N. Tzogopoulos *Lithuania's Past, Antisemitism, and Israel,* BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 1,314. Ramat Gan (Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies: Bar-Ilan, 2019). After all, the clearly explicit Islamophobia and racism exhibited by the author under scrutiny here throughout her piece, clearly goes to such attitudes, given that as countless scholars and studies have already proven, Islamophobia itself is a species of Antisemitism; see Reza Zia-Ebrahimi "*The French origins of 'Islamophobia denial'*," *in* ***Patterns of Prejudice***, volume 54, issue 4 (2020): 315-346; see also Paul A. Silverstein, "*The context of antisemitism and Islamophobia in France*," in ***Patterns of Prejudice***, volume 42, issue 1 (2008): 1-26.

[24] See his comments, 94-6.

[25] *Orientalism*, Ibid., 63.

[26] To wit,

> *The following epistle is both a fatwa as well as a larger polemic full of invective against the leader of one of the most dangerous and insidious* ***death cults*** *active in our time, and it is partially based on Ṣubḥ-i-Azal's (d. 1912 CE)* ***kitāb-i-mustayqiẓ*** *(The Book of the Sleeper Awakened)...*
>
> Referencing: https://bayanic.com/lib/fwd/must/Must-FWD.html?id=must (retrieved 9 May 2025 CE).

[27] "*Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom*," ***The New Centennial Review*** 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

[28] We are using Bruce Fink's translation of Jacques Lacan's *Écrits: The FIRST Complete Edition in English* in collaboration with Héloise Fink and Russell Grigg (W.W. Norton & Company: New York and London, 2006). For a proper gauge of Lacanian terminology and neologisms, we also highly recommend Dylan Evans' *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (Routledge: New York, 1966).

[29] https://www.fecris.org/ (retrieved 24 August 2025).

[30] *What is foreclosed from the Symbolic reappears in the Real*, in **Seminar III**, *The Psychoses*, trans. Russell Grigg (Norton: New York, 1993): 12 and elaborated throughout; see also "*The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious*" and "*The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*" in *Écrits*. Žižek observes:

> *However, according to Lacan's famous formula of the psychotic foreclosure 'what was foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real,' even in psychosis the letter does ultimately reach the subject, namely in the form of psychotic 'answers of the Real' (hallucinations and so forth).*

Online, https://www.lacan.com/symptom16/why.html (retrieved 24 August 2025).

[31] In Lacan, *jouissance* refers to an extreme, excessive pleasure or enjoyment that goes beyond the pleasure principle, often blurring with pain, suffering, and trauma. In short, it is a kind of hysteria.

[32] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egregore (retrieved 24 August 2025).

[33] See *Reflections on Seminar XVII: Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (ed.) Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (Duke University Press: Raleigh, 2007).

[34] https://bitterwinter.org/aropl-and-the-rise-of-new-age-anti-cultism-1-the-anti-cult-movement/ (retrieved 24 August 2025).

[35] See her "*The Not-So-New Religious Movements: Changes in 'the Cult Scene' over the Past Forty Years*," online, https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/60946/1/__lse.ac.uk_storage_LIBRARY_Secondary_libfile_shared_repository_Content_Barker%2C%20E_Not-so-new%20religious%20movements_Barker_Not-so-new%20religious%20movements_2015.pdf (retrieved 24 August 2025).

[36] See https://hirr.hartfordinternational.edu/articles/4172/ , https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_New_Vigilantes and https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-017-5616-7_25 (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[37] https://bitterwinter.org/editorial-board/ (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[38] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/01/children-living-former-uk-orphanage-ahmadi-religion-peace-light (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[39] https://www.gurumag.com/meet-the-doomsday-cult-taking-over-the-world/ (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[40] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/07/04/adbullah-hashem-aropl-self-declared-pope-crewe/ (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[41] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_Ikor (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[42] https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Practice/DSM/DSM-5-TR/APA-DSM5TR-CulturalFormulationInterview.pdf (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[43] https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-09/2024%20China%20Factsheet%20Sinicization.pdf (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[44] https://hrwf.eu/france-anti-cult-federation-fecris-membership-collapses-from-57-to-19-associations/ (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[45] '*Dad, imam, God': children living with self-declared pope in former UK orphanage*', ibid.
[46] https://bitterwinter.org/aropl-and-the-rise-of-new-age-anti-cultism-2-the-making-of-be-scofield/ (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[47] https://www.bu.edu/com/files/2021/04/WC_apstyle.pdf (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[48] https://glaad.org/reference/ (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[49] https://www.spj.org/pdf/spj-code-of-ethics.pdf (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[50] https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/gender-incongruence-and-transgender-health-in-the-icd, also see https://time.com/5596845/world-health-organization-transgender-identity/ (retrieved 24 August 2025).
[51] https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/Mental-Health-Disparities/Mental-Health-Facts-for-LGBTQ.pdf, https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2024/02/policy-supporting-transgender-nonbinary and https://www.apa.org/about/policy/transgender-nonbinary-inclusive-care; also see, https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2015/11/psychology-transgender (retrieved 24 August 2025).

[52] See for example, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2023/11/love-has-won-mother-god-cult-amy-carlson and https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/03-08-2019/meet-guru-hunter-be-scofield-scourge-of-cult-leaders-around-the-world (retrieved 24 August 2025).

[53] Note that the claim that Be Scofield once referred to Eileen Barker as "*the mother of all cult apologists*" currently rests only on *Bitter Winter*'s reporting, and then repeated in **CESNUR** and affiliated secondary venues that cite it. Because *Bitter Winter* is itself a partisan outlet tied to **CESNUR**, it cannot be considered a neutral or authoritative source for verifying quotations. Until the phrase can be located in Scofield's own writings, interviews, or in a mainstream publication, the attribution should be treated as unverified, unreliable, and possibly made up.

[54] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/INFORM (retrieved 24 August 2025).

[55] https://www.spj.org/pdf/spj-code-of-ethics.pdf (retrieved 24 August 2025).

[56] https://bitterwinter.org/aropl-and-the-rise-of-new-age-anti-cultism-3-be-scofields-delusional-journalism/ (retrieved 24 August 2025).

[57] https://www.generation-online.org/c/fcbiopolitics2.htm (retrieved 24 August 2025).

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Appendix

English translation of the *Il diagramma della macchina: Corvaglia e Azal sulla tecnognosi digitale*[1]

The Diagram of the Machine: Corvaglia and Azal on Digital Technognosis

By

Cosimo Barone

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It is difficult to imagine two people more different than **Luigi Corvaglia** and **Wahid Azal**. The first is a secular researcher and thinker, rationalist, grounded in scientific logic and Western democracy; the second is a mystical-political author of esoteric inspiration, a fierce critic of Occidentalism, technocratic liberalism, and transhumanist "techno-gnosticism." And yet their readings of the telematic network as a place of shifting spiritual currents useful to a certain cultural domination not only converge, they actually complement one another. Both glimpse in the structure of the network the potential for the emergence of new forms of cult: decentralized, mimetic, techno-spiritual.

The common starting point is a vision of the network as a field in which a modern, vulgarized form of **gnosticism** is enacted. Just as the ancient Gnostics believed the material world was a prison created not by God but by a lesser god—the deceiving **Demiurge**—and that only secret knowledge (*gnōsis*) could free the soul and restore it to divine light, so today the idea spreads online that shared reality (institutions, science, media, medicine, politics) is a grand illusion imposed by dark powers—often portrayed with mythical features: "elites," "the system," the "deep state."

In this context, the net ceases to be merely a formidable informational and connective space and becomes an **initiatory environment** where the user can "discover the truth" that has been hidden. Whoever accesses this hidden knowledge is considered "awakened," set against the sleeping masses. Thus an epistemic dualism is created between those who know and those who do not, between the saved and the profane—reproducing the spiritual hierarchies of ancient gnosticism but also the sectarian logics of modernity.

Corvaglia and the Swarm-Cults

In his essay devoted to **infodemic** and new digital cults (*Pandemonium. Cyber-cults and digital fascism*, 2019), **Luigi Corvaglia** analyzes a process radically changed from the past: the genesis of subcultures and alternative ideas today no longer requires charismatic leadership or a vertical structure, but manifests as **systemic emergence**, i.e., the effect of chaotic communicative dynamics governed by network algorithms. Consider the spread of conspiracy theories and the proliferation of subcultures distrustful of established knowledge such as medicine. These are **sociopoietic** conditions, produced spontaneously by social interactions yet strengthened by **echo chambers** generated by algorithms. Social-platform algorithms (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok) play a central role in creating echo chambers, because they decide which contents to show each user based on what they have already watched, liked, or shared. In short, they analyze user behavior (likes, shares, time spent on certain posts, comments), predict what might please, and propose similar content

while excluding dissonant content that could cause boredom, disinterest, or abandonment. The result is that the user sees only a filtered portion of reality—the one that most resembles or pleases them. The endpoint is the individual's closure inside an **information bubble**. Mutual confirmation of one's ideas within the bubble amplifies convictions and radicalizes them; opposing opinions disappear or are attacked, and **disinformation** can circulate undisturbed.

In sum: algorithms do not create ideas directly, but **organize the environment** in which those ideas strengthen, radicalize, and become tribal. They are the **invisible architects** of alternative subcultures. These digital places are ideological incubators where **truth does not count**; what matters is coherence with the group's narrative and the sense of belonging. They are a key factor in the transformation of social networks into sectarian and paranoid ecosystems. This is the perfect infrastructure for the rooting of what Corvaglia calls **"cult-like swarm belief systems"**—group phenomena which, though lacking vertical leadership and codified doctrine, behave as real sects. They are **autopoietic** social formations born from the continuous interaction of actors, algorithms, and contents—not from a pre-ordained plan. Belief is not imposed from above; it **emerges from below** by viral aggregation, exactly like the murmurations of birds or insect colonies. They operate as **distributed intelligences**, where each participant feeds the group's collective identity without necessarily being aware of it. It is the idea of the **hive mind**. As in a swarm of social insects, each individual responds to simple signals (hashtags, keywords, emotional

frames), but the collective effect is the emergence of a coherent, replicable system capable of attracting new adherents and redefining common sense.

A paradigmatic example is **QAnon**, the theory to which Corvaglia has dedicated an essay (*QAnon. Cybernetic cult and digital fascism*), in which he shows how a conspiracy theory without an identifiable author can generate a global cult with believers, codes, rituals, and martyrs. **QAnon** reinterprets *gnosis* as access to forbidden truths in a world dominated by dark forces. It is a **churchless cult**, where "truth" is crowdsourced and charisma is diffused as an **emergent property** of the ecosystem. Nor is it the only case. The most emblematic manifestation—because it fully reprises the gnostic model—is the **incel** movement, made up of men who live with angry frustration the impossibility of having sexual or affective relationships because they do not fit female standards of desirability (*incel* = "involuntary celibate"). Incels use the metaphor of the **red pill** (from *The Matrix*), according to which whoever "takes it" stops believing the illusions imposed by society (such as equality between the sexes) and recognizes a supposed reality in which women hold relational and sexual power, choosing only a narrow elite of dominant males (the **Chads**) and excluding all the others. The Matrix "red pill" becomes a symbol of **postmodern gnosis**: truth is hidden, the world is a simulation, salvation is for those who "awaken"—central concepts both in New Age spirituality and in digital conspiracism.

An emblematic example of a cult with gnostic characteristics that unfolds exclusively online is the **New Earth Project**, led by the charismatic figure **Sacha**

Stone. Operating through YouTube, Telegram, and dedicated platforms, the group spreads an apocalyptic spiritual vision in which reality is controlled by dark forces (elites, Big Pharma, 5G technologies), while salvation is obtained through an interior "awakening" and disconnection from the system's matrix. Although it has no physical headquarters or traditional rites, the cult functions as a **virtual sectarian community** with esoteric language, paid courses, digital rituality, and a salvific narrative that isolates the individual from the outside world.

Other phenomena in this frame include **eco-fascism** of neo-pagan matrix (e.g., *Ringing Cedars*), or **Pastel Q**—"anti-system" and conspiratorial messages conveyed with graphics aimed at a female audience and an influencer-style wellness mode, where pastel-background posts mix yoga, beauty care, and conspiratorial content. The latter is one of the main examples of **conspirituality** (fusion of spirituality and conspiracism) and represents a sophisticated **memetic strategy** in which a reassuring domestic aesthetic serves to legitimize, normalize, and spread violent and radical messages.

In the world of **swarm cults**, reality is treated like a collective **Rorschach test**: each person projects archetypes, anxieties, and personal myths into it, but everyone finds echo and reinforcement in the system.

The fact that digital swarms are the product of a hive mind—i.e., not guided—does not mean some digital cults are not directed, constructed, or infiltrated by real stage-managers. This is certainly the case with **AllatRa**. AllatRa is not a traditional cult: it makes massive use of **artificial intelligence** to produce delirious videos and

articles and also draws on pop culture, comics, and rap—always with AI's help. This prototype of **cult 2.0** spreads climate disinformation, conspiracy theories, and **pan-Slavic propaganda** with enormous firepower exclusively through the web, managing to gain visibility and infiltrate institutional spaces like the **United Nations** and the **U.S. Congress**. Within AllatRa's digital ecosystem, **bots** play a fundamental role in building an artificial appearance of consensus and popularity. These are automated accounts programmed to post and repost content systematically, often using hashtags like **#CreativeSociety** or recurring phrases tied to the movement's language. Their main purpose is to **amplify** the visibility of sectarian messages, manipulating social-media algorithms so that contents trend or reach a wider audience. The real strength lies in coordination: hundreds of bots can activate simultaneously, simulating spontaneous mobilization (**astroturfing**) and making AllatRa's contents appear part of an authentic public debate. Alongside this are **trolls**—real or semi-automated accounts—intervening with provocative, emotional, or seemingly spontaneous comments, further reinforcing the group's narrative. In the article **The AllatRa Case** Luigi Corvaglia recounts his direct experience: a disinformation campaign launched by this Russian-language apocalyptic movement that publicly accused him of wanting to establish a new world Reich. In a short time, the web was flooded with defamatory content about the author in every language, with the most incredible accusations, such as calling him a **coprophile**.

Together, bots and trolls create an ecosystem of **hybrid disinformation**: the former build numerical mass; the latter give the message a human appearance. The

result is a refined digital strategy that confuses collective perception, discourages dissent, and strengthens the apparent legitimacy of the cult.

Apocryphal Cults and Digital Apocalypses: Wahid Azal's Vision

Wahid Azal addresses the same phenomenon from another angle: the **gnostic-metapolitical** one. This is a radical critique of the esoteric-political and nihilistic drift of the digital. For Azal, the network has become a **spiritual battlefield** where a perverse form of gnosis is enacted: no longer a path of inner liberation, but an instrument of power, manipulation, and control. Azal warns against what he calls a **false gnosis**, a nihilistic **technognosis** that reduces spiritual experience to a simulacrum, replacing awakening with paranoia and inquiry with toxic narrative. The net is full of **transhumanist** and **cyber-gnostic** currents that see reality as a simulation to flee via technology or inner awareness.

Azal denounces what he defines as a **totalitarian mutation of the sacred**: a passage in which the occult, gnosticism, and religion merge with the cybernetic infrastructure of surveillance and algorithmic consent. According to Azal, we have entered an era in which fascism no longer presents itself with boots and black shirts, but with **interfaces, platforms, neural networks**, and **prêt-à-porter spirituality**. **AllatRa** seems an exemplary case.

Azal's writing is mystical, full of neologisms, at times hermetic. In his recent **Postpartem to *The Goal of the Unwise*** (June 2025) he describes the emergence of a

"meta-theocratic machine," designed to simulate transcendence and produce obedience. According to Azal, digital cults are not merely strange or deviant communities but true **post-human religious technologies**—digital tools that imitate spirituality with the aim of training minds into submission, exploiting the power of algorithms. In Azal's view, the net does not elevate; it **trains**: its "fake transcendence" is negative because it does not lead to spiritual liberation but to a form of **cognitive conformism**, domestication of consciences; it does not generate faith but **automation of beliefs**. This digital spirituality is not authentic revelation but a **choreography of the sacred** that keeps the user in a state of affective, perceptual, and ideological dependence.

For Azal, platforms like **YouTube, Telegram, Reddit, or TikTok** are not just communication tools but true **digital liturgical spaces** in which new cults—often fragmentary, violent, apocalyptic—find fertile ground. The danger is not a secret conspiracy but the emergence of a **"machine" that imitates God**: a network of symbols, algorithms, platforms, and narratives. He uses the metaphor of the **Demiurge**, the craftsman-god of the universe whom the Gnostics saw as the principle of the present cosmic order—a metaphor also used by Corvaglia (*L'illusione di scegliere*, 2023). This machine **feigns transcendence while training conformity**. The process is often unconscious even for its participants. Here enters the idea of the **meta-theocratic machine**: not a sect with a visible leader, but a **diffuse techno-sacral structure** that produces obedience while masking it as spiritual freedom. Here there is a parallel with Corvaglia's hive mind.

Azal speaks symbolically of a **curvature of algorithms**, meaning that platforms—far from being neutral—shape information and perception in such a way as to favor:

- the **memetic reproduction** of extreme, spiritualist, conspiracist content;
- the construction of **self-referential ecosystems** (metastable digital bubbles);
- **symbolic seduction** through images, sounds, and sacralized languages.

In this sense, the algorithm is not just a filter but a **computational priest** regulating what one sees, believes, and feels as "true."

Beyond possible mystical overreach, the most interesting aspect is that Azal refers to groups like **AROLP (Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light)** as **"metastable,"** i.e., capable of withstanding attacks and reproducing their contents in hostile informational environments, thanks also to the algorithmic protection of platforms. These digital-era cults are **systems designed to endure**, able to reproduce their core contents and profit from algorithmic dynamics that favor their diffusion despite censorship or contestation. This observation underscores how the network's dynamic flows and the **"folds" of algorithms** not only affect the structuring of myths and online cults but are also responsible for their **persistence**.

The investigation conducted by Corvaglia into the transnational network linking contentious cults like **Scientology**, **lobbying organizations** defending religious freedom, **centers for the study of new religious movements** (such as

CESNUR), and **neocon American foundations** (*The mafia of cult apologists*, 2024) seems to Azal a confirmation of his intuitions:

"**Corvaglia has diagrammed the machine.**"

By this Azal recognizes that Corvaglia's work has traced, analytically and with documentation, the **ideological and geopolitical functioning** of the very structure of symbolic power that he has described in theological and metapolitical terms.

In other words, Corvaglia provides the **"rational proof"** of what Azal perceives as intuitive or revealed truth. The two approaches—the **gnostic-metaphysical** and the **scientific-psychosocial**—converge in identifying in digital cults and the sacralized network a new system of **epistemic power**.

Corvaglia (more empirical, based on social psychology and analysis of **soft power** dynamics) shows how those mechanisms of the **meta-theocratic machine** translate into concrete reality.

Azal provides the **"vertical"** reading (gnostic-metaphysical); Corvaglia the **"horizontal"** one (structural-observable). Together, they show **two faces of the same system.**

Narrative Shields and Salvific Algorithms: The Hegemony of the Simulated Sacred

Corvaglia and Azal also converge on a critical point: **digital cults do not act alone**. They need **legitimizing structures**, such as **CESNUR** (Center for Studies on New Religions, directed by **Massimo Introvigne**) and the magazine **Bitter Winter**.

These entities defend controversial groups (Scientology, Falun Gong, Church of Almighty God, etc.); attack activists and critical scholars (defined as part of an "anti-cult movement"); and participate in **international lobbying networks**, often in synergy with **pro-Russian** and reactionary clerical environments, as Corvaglia has also shown in the **AllatRa** case.

These structures function as **"narrative shields,"** conferring media and academic legitimacy on organizations operating in the gray zone between spirituality, propaganda, and manipulation.

Influence in favor of the cults passes not only through content but through the **very grammar** by which they are presented, exploiting platform algorithmic logics. Sectarian groups and their apologists use **highly indexable keywords**—religious freedom, tolerance, spiritual diversity, awakening, peace—that **reframe** critical concepts semantically. Reports of abuse are thus transformed into "religious intolerance"; disobedience to a sect into "ideological persecution."

Algorithms favor content that generates **engagement**, and cult organizations have learned to modulate their language to be compatible with the platforms' value filters. In this way, manipulative content **appears neutral or edifying**, while analytical critiques, more complex and less viral, remain invisible. It is within this semantic and perceptual imbalance that, as Corvaglia and Azal observe, the new **hegemony of the simulated sacred** is played out. The result is **automated protection**, where toxic content is disguised as spiritual pluralism, making it difficult—if not impossible—for the average user to distinguish it from legitimate initiatives. In plain

terms, **algorithmic curvature**—the set of invisible mechanisms through which digital-platform algorithms select, amplify, or silence content—**favors the apologists' narrative**.

As Corvaglia and Azal note from different perspectives, **today's war is semantic**: "a battle over who has the power to dominate reality, to define religion, to weaponize transcendence." In other words, it is a struggle over who has the power to **name**, to define what freedom, truth, spirituality are. And algorithms, far from being neutral, are the **new clerics** of this invisible war.

Conclusion: Two Diagnoses, One Common Enemy

Corvaglia and Azal start from very different positions: **clinical rationalism** for the former, **radical mysticism** for the latter. Yet they converge on a fundamental intuition: the net has made possible **cults without cult**, **obediences without orders**, **totalitarianisms without a State**.

Corvaglia proposes **critical education** and unmasking. Azal calls for a **counter-sacred narration** capable of opposing the algorithm with new symbols. Both remind us that today the battle for freedom is fought not only in politics or the economy but in **language, symbols, and shared semantics**.

The real threat is not fanaticism. It is **invisible influence** disguised as awakening or as the defense of human rights.

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